

All That Matters



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ALL THAT MATTERS

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BY

PEARL WEYMOUTH



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THOMAS SELTZER

1924

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I have written this book in the hope that it will appeal to those who, in spite of the atrophying effect of civilisation on elemental emotions, can yet perceive that the call of the blood, in healthy surroundings, draws inspiration from other sources than that which creates the hunger of the wolf.—P. W.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
BOOK ONE— <i>At Longfield</i>	3
BOOK TWO— <i>At Becclesfield</i>119
BOOK THREE— <i>At Longfield Again</i>	153

BOOK I
AT LONGFIELD

ALL THAT MATTERS

CHAPTER I

THERE was a knock at the door and the butler entered.
“Have you seen Mr. Cleeve this morning, Elton?”

“Yes, sir, he’s just finished breakfast, and as he put a few lumps of sugar in his pocket I fancy he’s round at the stables.”

“You might go and see if you can find him. I want him rather particularly.”

The study door closed and Col. Barrington rose from his desk and started to pace up and down the room, an open letter in his hand.

The door opened again. He turned round with a worried look, which quickly died away as his eyes fell on his wife.

Mrs. Barrington, who had noticed that worried look, turned to leave the room.

“Don’t go, Sarah. You’ve come in at a very opportune moment. I’ve just heard from Travers and I’m afraid our hopes are dashed once more.”

“You don’t mean to say, Sam, that the Conservative Association has refused to support Cleeve?”

“Well, it’s not quite as bad as that, Sarah. Travers hasn’t exactly put it before the committee yet; all he says is that, as Chairman, he will do his best, but thinks the fact that Cleeve is unmarried a serious handicap, and goes on to say that the other members of the committee,—realising that the popularity of the present Liberal member’s wife played a great part in the last election,—are anxious to have a married candidate.”

“Sam, I expected this. You see, dear, the women’s vote does count, and it really is time Cleeve married.”

Mrs. Barrington, however, got no further than this. The conversation was interrupted by the sound of approaching footsteps and the humming of a favourite ditty somewhat out of tune.

"When all the world was young, lad, and all the trees were green,
And every goose a swan, lad, and every lass a queen,
Then hey for boot and spur, lad, and o'er the hills away,
For youth must have its run, lad, and every dog its day."

A smile played over Mrs. Barrington's face. She looked at her husband as she tried to suppress it, and he seemed to understand her thoughts, for a whimsical expression gleamed in his eyes as he ejaculated the one word, "Irrepressible!" in an audible whisper just as Cleeve entered the room.

"Hello, Guv'nor, what's this pow-pow?" and going up to his mother Cleeve took her face between his hands, kissed her an affectionate good-morning, and looking laughingly into her eyes, said in expressive imitation of his father:

"You know, Sarah, it's time Cleeve married!"

Col. Barrington frowned in an attempt to cover the smile which trembled on his lips as he interposed with, "Now, my boy, do be serious for once in a way. I have heard from Admiral Travers this morning, and from what he says I am very doubtful of the Conservative Association nominating you as their candidate. You know, Cleeve, I wanted you to go in for the Army. It was your wish to adopt a political career, and I have spared neither trouble nor expense in fitting you for it."

"I see what's coming, Guv'nor," said Cleeve, determined to bring the matter to a head without any preliminaries. "You want me to marry. I guessed it the minute I saw you and mother together. Old Travers is always dropping hints on the same subject. It's perfectly ridiculous! They want bachelors in Parliament just as they want married men, and I don't see why I should sacrifice my freedom just to fall in with the views of the round dozen old fogies who call themselves the Committee of the Conservative Association! Fact of the matter is, Guv'nor, old Cartwright wants me to marry his own lumping daughter and I'm not on! Then there is the Hon. E. P. Maynard, another member of that august body, who would like me to marry his scarecrow of a daughter! And I have no doubt you have got someone in your mind's eye. I'll marry right

enough when the right girl comes along, and not before. You wouldn't have me do otherwise, would you, mother?"

"Cleeve, I don't want you to marry against your wish, but I do think, my dear boy, it is time you began looking round. Surely there are plenty of nice girls for you to choose from, and I don't want my boy to be an old man by the time he has children. The one regret your father and I have is that we did not marry when we were a little younger."

"No, mother, it's no regret at all, is it? If you'd married younger you might have had a daughter instead of Cleeve, and what would you do if you hadn't Cleeve to call you mother, eh?"

Mrs. Barrington gave a little chuckle. She dearly loved this irrepressible son of hers and she liked his trading on that love.

Col. Barrington coughed. He saw that if he let mother and son talk it out, as they had so often talked it out before, they would end just where they had begun.

"Come, come! Cleeve, do let's get to business! We've talked this over before, I know, and it's never come to anything, but after all you're getting on, my boy. Let me see, you'll be twenty-seven next birthday, won't you? And you haven't begun to take life seriously. Both your mother and I have been very patient, but isn't it time you did marry and settle down, quite apart from the question of its desirability from a political point of view?"

"All right, Guv'nor, I will be serious. The fact of the matter is one gets so many false starts. You meet a girl, you like her, you begin to think she's the one girl in a million, but, as you get to know her, you discover some little trait which shows that you could never be in tune with her. Then before you've really had time to weigh the matter up, another girl comes on the scene with, what you consider, infinitely greater attractions, and later you find out that her faults are infinitely greater too."

For a few minutes there was silence. This was the first time that Cleeve had expressed any decided views on the subject, and Col. Barrington, as he ran through the names of the score or more of girls who had attracted Cleeve at one

time or another, had to admit to himself that each and every one had her drawbacks.

Mrs. Barrington's thoughts were now equally in sympathy with Cleeve. Sam had not met her until late in life, and she had refused suitor after suitor because she found that as soon as men paid her court her interest slackened, and as she got to know them they sounded notes which jarred. It was only Sam who had never struck a false note as far as the chords of her heart were concerned.

Cleeve's thoughts also went a-roving. They flew back to a dance five years ago, when a slim, graceful girl, with chestnut hair, big violet eyes and lips so red that they almost belied the innocent tantalising expression of her face, had seemed to blow into the room like a cool fresh breeze on that sultry evening.

It had all happened at the Three Arts Ball, and none of his friends knew the girl. Somehow the events of that night had always stood out in his memory. He could get no one to introduce him and he saw her being claimed by partner after partner with a regularity which threatened to thwart his design. But at last his opportunity came. She was alone in the hall for a few brief seconds, and then he put into practice his intention. Without a word of apology or explanation his arm slipped round her waist, and before the girl could utter a word of protest he had drawn her into the dance, both of them well aware of the sullen face of an elderly, aristocratic gentleman who watched them with a sinister expression in his eyes. How divinely her steps fitted in with his! He remembered it all. Remembered the devil that got hold of him, the satisfaction he felt at the towering passion depicted on that aristocratic face, the delight he took in the frightened deer-like expression in her eyes as they swayed to the rhythm of the music under the very nose of the man who seemed so impotent in his anger. And then the look of happiness and merriment she seemed to catch from him as they receded from that figure. He could feel again that dainty kiss-inviting hand which rested on his shoulder. The thrill he experienced as a little wave of her hair floated across his cheek. The look of confidence and trust she gave as the dance ended, and the cloud of

anxiety which shadowed her face as they both stood clapping for an encore. He recalled his sense of exultant happiness, the swell of pride as the music began to tell its love dream over again when she, without an invitation, placed her hand on his shoulder as if the stolen moments were too precious to be lost. Then as the music quickened preparatory to the finish he recalled his eager request for another dance, and the expression in her eyes as she told him there would never be another. His feeling of despair as she watched the aristocratic figure approaching like a jailer to claim a prisoner. The hurried whispers between the two, the receding figures as they left the ballroom, his attempt to follow when it was too late. And more particularly his feelings of anger, hate and longing as the door of the brougham closed smartly on one who had crept into his heart and bombed it without permission; and finally the overwhelming feeling of loneliness at the scrunching of the wheels as the brougham disappeared into the darkness.

He was brought back to earth again; his father was speaking.

"You know, Cleeve, your mother wants to see you married even more than I do, and you don't know what it would mean to her happiness, and to mine, to see a little grandson and to know that there will be someone to carry on the name. Isn't that so, Sarah?" added the old man, looking wistfully at his wife.

Cleeve looked at his mother and thought he saw tears gathering in her eyes. It struck him how frail and delicate-looking she was. He had never noticed those blue veins over her temples before. The vision of the dance completely faded away. He read in his mother's eyes the meaning of the look she gave him; he read it correctly. There was no need for her now to add her voice to that of his father, for he read as clearly as if it had been printed across her brow that she felt she had not long to live. He read the unspoken appeal which sprung from her wish to see him married before the time came to say goodbye; and he bent down and kissed her. He understood at last!

CHAPTER II

A FEW days later Cleeve Barrington, for perhaps the first time in his life, found himself seriously studying his own affairs. Yes, it was true, he was getting on in years. It was only natural that his father and mother should wish to see him comfortably settled in life. He had had his fling, and as for that vision of five years ago, it was a thing of the past. Was his career to be blighted by the memory of a nameless being who had on one solitary occasion just flitted into and out of his life? After all they had only been together for a few fleeting minutes, and it would probably have been the same with her as with the others. A little intimacy and the flaw would disclose itself, then those notes which jarred would be heard again. Every woman had jarring notes; he should have realised it before. Nobody was ideal, and if he were to defer his marriage until he met the ideal woman he would have to carry on the search in another world.

Country life had its attractions, but it hardly satisfied the ambitions of a man. He was getting to an age when nature called for something more than the satisfaction of its sporting instincts. He had to confess that he was getting discontented with his present mode of living. There was a growing craving to be up and doing something that would enable him to make a name in the world. Yes! he would marry and settle down, and throwing himself ardently into politics earn the respect of his fellow men.

These thoughts were interrupted by a knock at the door and the appearance of Elton with a note.

“The messenger is waiting for a reply, sir.”

Swanston House.

MY DEAR CLEEVE,

Will you once more act the part of good Samaritan and come over to help us with our decorations? I expected my niece yesterday,

but she has only just arrived and is too tired to help, so your assistance would be very welcome.

Yours sincerely,

ELOISE DE HAVILAND.

P.S.—Alice and Muriel Ryder are here.

Cleeve crushed the letter into a ball and threw it on the fire. The ball expanded with the heat. He watched it with an abstracted air. Slowly the ball opened exposing the postscript "Alice and Muriel Ryder are here." The charred edges crept nearer, and finally the sentence disappeared in the flames, and then point came to his thoughts.

"Circumstances and fate mean me to choose one of them," he reflected. "But it's very difficult to work up any enthusiasm when they're both dressed so much alike; when both go to the same places at the same time, one in a blue dress, the other in a pink, both cut from the same pattern. One in a blue hat, the other in a pink, but both fashioned on the same shape. A mother like Mrs. Ryder should be held responsible for a criminal act, that of conspiring to wreck the marriageable chances of two otherwise desirable girls. There should be a law compelling the mother to dress one, and the father the other."

"Any reply, sir?" said Elton.

"Yes, one minute, Elton," responded Cleeve, and seating himself at the writing desk he scribbled off a reply . . . "He would be delighted to come and give any help he could, etc., etc. . . ."

He folded the note and as he addressed the envelope his thoughts took up their previous trend. . . . But were they both alike?

Lately circumstances had thrown him and Muriel together and the last few months had enabled him to obtain quite a sound knowledge of her. There was no doubt she was an attractive girl. No replica of the too wise and ultra-modern women with their interminable discourses on Freudism, feminism, socialism, and all the other "isms" which the average man hates but sometimes puts up with for the sake of other things. She didn't look too good like the shrinking mid-Victorian miss who could only face life with a bottle of smelling salts. She could run a house, for

Mrs. Ryder had seen to that part of her education, and after all if a man were to be comfortable it was essential that his wife should excel in the home.

She was an outdoor girl too. Played a good game of tennis, could sit a horse. In fact the more he considered, the more Muriel appeared desirable. The picture of Muriel as he had last seen her focussed itself on his mind.

He had left her at the footpath leading to the vicarage, and as he was helping her over the stile her dress had caught on a nail and she had fallen backward into his arms. He remembered that little thrill he had experienced, how for one brief instant he had held her tightly in his embrace, how dangerously near her face had been to his and the sudden temptation that had assailed him.

He recalled his feelings at the time and as he dwelt on them he made up his mind to vacillate no more. The Adam in him was pulling hard! In his imagination he held her in his arms again, and the thought stirred his being.

Mechanically he handed Elton the note and, oblivious of everything but his thoughts, mentally clasped Muriel to him and unconsciously muttered aloud: "And tell Mrs. de Haviland to put her niece to bed."

"Yes, sir," said Elton as he shut the door.

"Yes, sir?" repeated Cleeve. "What the devil does Elton mean? Can that man read my thoughts?" He dismissed the idea as an impossibility and ascribing Elton's reply to an excess of politeness he resumed his reverie. "Yes, Muriel, tell Mrs. de Haviland to put the niece to bed and send everyone away so that you and I can have a few minutes alone, for this afternoon I want to tell you something. To tell you that I've waited long enough. After all, Muriel Ryder, you're a very attractive girl in some ways, and a man might go much farther and fare much worse."

CHAPTER III

THE drawing-room at Swanston House was being rapidly converted to serve the purpose of a ballroom. By the time Cleeve entered, the heavy furniture had been removed and the oak floor stripped of its rugs. Numerous Chinese lanterns and several heaps of coloured muslin lay scattered about, but Cleeve took no notice of these things. He was only aware of Muriel Ryder at the far end of the room endeavouring to drape one of the French windows which opened on to the terrace.

A hasty glance round assured him that she was alone, and he advanced with the intention to seize the present opportunity to ascertain her real feelings towards him.

"Hello, Mr. Barrington, you've come? This is a surprise!"

"Well, it shouldn't be," replied Cleeve, "I sent a note round an hour ago to Mrs. de Haviland saying I was coming."

"Oh, but you know what men are, Mr. Barrington! They usually turn up when all the work is finished and, holding out their hands like clowns in a circus, run round pretending to do things which have already been done!"

Cleeve laughed. "Yes, I suppose we are like that. Helpless things men, aren't they?"

"Yes, they are!"

Muriel started to descend the ladder, on which she had been standing while trying to persuade a fold of muslin to take the exact curve she wanted, and looked down on to Cleeve's upturned face. There was a mischievous gleam in her eyes combined with a look of triumph born of the knowledge that the man who was speaking to her was not entirely indifferent to her attractions. The look he had given her and the way he had held her as he released her dress from that nail on the stile had conveyed to her an

impression that a new era was possibly about to dawn for them both.

She had given much thought to her future since their last meeting and knowing Cleeve, as she thought, fairly well, she anticipated that he would be more inclined to retreat than advance at their next interview.

The light banter which had passed between them did not deceive Muriel Ryder, for the tone of his voice vibrated the antennae of her womanly intuition and warned her that Cleeve Barrington was about to make a definite advance. She noted the determined look on his face, the serious expression of his eyes, and the mischievous gleam in hers quickly changed to a look of extreme demureness. This lightning change, this exhibition of the actor's part, which comes to most women in more or less degree when an attack of this nature takes them by surprise, acted as an additional incentive to Cleeve's determination. He had a sudden desire to clasp this attractive girl in his arms, and he couldn't quite understand himself.

It was true that after their last meeting his thoughts, now and then, had wandered in her direction, but until that morning they had not been serious thoughts. He tried to analyse his feelings, to understand why he had such an overwhelming desire to clasp and kiss her. He had met her hundreds of times before without having had a similar desire. She attracted him, but never till this minute, excepting perhaps that occasion at the stile, had there been any element of sex appeal. Now he felt regret that he had not kissed her when he had the opportunity. He wondered what it would feel like to touch her lips, to draw her closely to him. And at that thought he had a sub-conscious impression that if he had taken the opportunity when it presented itself at the stile, the love which he had always hoped for might have sprung from the embrace. Then came the events of that other morning. His father's conversation, his mother's silent appeal, and now this meeting. It all seemed to him the hand of fate. The desire to hold this girl in his arms was irresistible, and it was a desire which quickly transformed itself into action.

His arms went out to embrace her as she descended the ladder, a whisper escaped his lips, but a whisper so strong and deep it could be heard all over the room.

“Muriel, I want you!” . . . His lips touched hers.

A startled exclamation from Muriel, whose eyes had turned in another direction, warned him they were not alone; and swinging round with a fierce look on his face he met the astonished gaze of a tall, slim girl who had halted in the doorway opposite them. A look of confusion on the girl's face conveyed more forcibly than words that not only had she seen that kiss but had heard the yearning cry which preceded it. The anger which sprung to his face at the intrusion was replaced by a look of amazement and incredulity. Was he dreaming? Was it an apparition? A phantasy of his mind? That he saw in that doorway the girl with whom he had danced five years ago?

Something in the girl's astonished expression prompted him to save her from blurting out any apology for her intrusion. The look on her face suggested incredulity, but something more than incredulity, and to Cleeve Barrington it appeared as though she was striving to blot out a vision of something unclean.

In the thoughts which followed that belief Cleeve found his lost wits. This was no phantasy of his mind, and he somehow clearly read the girl's intention to make an apology which would give her an excuse for quitting the room and leaving him alone with Muriel again. The desire to frustrate that intention energised his brain. He would not be left alone with Muriel. If the girl left, he would leave with her. Oh! how he regretted his speech and action! What a damned fool he felt! He would rather the whole world had witnessed what had passed than that slim, graceful girl in the doorway; and it was perhaps this latter reflection which, more than anything else, restored his self-control.

His eyes returned to Muriel as he commenced to speak in a perfectly natural self-possessed voice: “I think, Muriel”—the absence of the word “Miss” was intentional—“we've played kiss in the ring long enough! What do you say to doing a little work now?”

His words were accompanied by such a confiding, insinuating smile of amusement that the tension of the situation was momentarily relieved.

Giving Cleeve an understanding look which plainly conveyed her gratitude for his successful attempt to save an awkward situation, Muriel advanced towards the girl in the doorway.

“I quite agree with you, Mr. Barrington, but I must first introduce you to Mrs. de Haviland’s niece.”

Still covered with blushes which had been brought into being by his passionate cry and heightened by the confused feelings which the interruption had caused, Muriel Ryder hurriedly sought a diversion in the introduction which followed.

“Yvonne, this is Mr. Barrington. Mr. Barrington, I don’t think you have met Mrs. de Haviland’s niece before . . . I’ve forgotten your other name,” she added disjointedly, turning towards the intruder.

It was rather a quaint introduction, but Yvonne, for some reason she could never afterwards quite explain, let it pass. And Muriel, who had not quite recovered from her previous excitement, was too unnerved to notice anything strikingly unusual in the introduction. She was longing to be alone. Her one desire was to seek some sheltered spot where she could commune with her thoughts, and making the excuse that she must go and find her sister, she hurried away, leaving Cleeve and Yvonne together.

CHAPTER IV

IT WAS an awkward moment for Cleeve Barrington, but, finding himself alone with Yvonne, he assumed an indifference he was far from feeling as he turned to address her. "Well, I never expected to see you again! Had I known that Mrs. de Haviland's niece was the little lady I danced with five years ago I should have been here an hour earlier."

"Yes, I suppose you would! It's my fault, Mr. Barrington, not yours. You didn't expect to see me so early on the scene, but I knew you were coming and was waiting for you."

"What, then you've known who I was all along! And instead of resting after your journey you preferred to seek me?" replied Cleeve, on whom the insinuation in Yvonne's remark was lost.

"I knew your name, but I didn't associate it with any previous meeting. My aunt gave such a glowing account of you that I thought I would just peep into the ballroom. Just a womanly curiosity, you know. But, of course, I can see it would have been better for you if I had not indulged it, or better still, if you had come an hour earlier."

Cleeve Barrington winced and, hurriedly turning the conversation, replied, "Well, you know, I only came to help with these decorations and I understood both the Miss Ryders would be here, but now it looks as if"—here he glanced round at the otherwise empty room—"I shall have to do it all myself, and a pretty mess I'll make of it without a little feminine touch, eh?"

The tantalising strain in Yvonne's nature could not be suppressed and her dark violet eyes lit up with what Cleeve Barrington took to be merriment as she replied, "Yes, I thought myself when I came in a little feminine touch was what was wanted!"

For Cleeve Barrington the awkwardness of the situation was relieved by that merriment. He burst out laughing and suggested that she should help him if she were not too tired. . . . "Would she mount the step ladder and finish the draping of the door on which Miss Ryder had been engaged?"

"I think you or Miss Ryder should finish what you began," said Yvonne very significantly. "You know the old adage: 'Too many cooks spoil the broth'. . . . And besides, I don't like beginning where others leave off."

Cleeve winced again at that remark; turning it over quickly in his mind he came to the conclusion that it might refer, not only to the work of draping the door, but to the interrupted scene which she had witnessed between himself and Muriel.

The spell of understanding which he thought had been established was suddenly broken, as Yvonne intended it should be. For some reason or other she did not like Cleeve Barrington's complacent jocularities, and, as a matter of fact, Cleeve was not particularly enamoured of himself at the moment. He knew that if anyone other than Yvonne had entered the room he would have been making some lame excuse to absent himself in order to renew his interrupted conversation with Muriel, yet there he stood with no such intention, like a moth, hovering round a candle flame, courting the singeing of its wings. There was a double meaning in all Yvonne's remarks, he was sure, and for some unaccountable reason he had fallen in his own estimation. He felt the sting of her subtlety, and manlike, was angry with her because he considered she had only helped to relieve the situation in order to create an atmosphere of greater antipathy, and with Muriel for leaving him alone with this bewitching girl whose tongue had alternately soothed and stung.

With that wince and the look which accompanied it Yvonne's desire for further conversation evaporated, as also did Cleeve's, who felt more inclined to go out and swear. And so it happened that in that atmosphere of antipathy they both, as if by mutual agreement, sought solace in the work before them, and by tea-time had completed the decoration of the room.

Their work finished, Cleeve advanced to the centre of the room to survey the result of their handiwork and was immediately joined by Yvonne.

“Are you satisfied, Miss Yvonne, or are you sorry you began where others left off?” He made the remark in a rather distant tone, breaking the silence which had hung like a heavy cloud over the room for so long a time.

The work had proceeded in silence, but Yvonne had on occasions, almost too numerous to count, glanced in his direction and was somewhat piqued because he had never so much as glanced in hers. She had changed her opinion about this man. He had done things so quietly with a set look of determination on his face and had so completely ignored her presence that she somehow sensed a hidden strength in his character. “I should like to see him really roused,” she thought.

He looked her straight in the face as he asked his question and his jaws had closed with a snap which suggested that in his present mood it would take little to rouse him. There was no doubt about it he was a man who would appeal to many women. His steel blue eyes were steady and unflinching, the straight, refined nose, set mouth and firm chin looked austere when untempered by a smile, but now his nostrils were slightly distended, indicative of suppressed excitement. He seemed to be waiting for her reply with no little degree of impatience, and there was a look of challenge about his whole attitude. His broad shoulders and tall, shapely body seemed itching to move, and in reality but little impulse was needed to make them move, for his whole being was strung to action.

The oppressive silence of the afternoon had had its effect. The anger which had prompted him to set about his work so quietly had gathered strength. As tack after tack had been driven home, to keep the coloured muslin in place, the strokes of his hammer had seemed to re-echo those sneering words, “I don’t want to begin where others leave off.” He read a taunt in the sentence, and his calm outward demeanour was only an artificial veneer holding in check a storm of anger which had increased as Yvonne had continued to ignore his presence.

Yvonne saw this. It could clearly be read in the ex-

pression of his eyes. Instinctively she knew that she could allay that storm. She had only to express her satisfaction and to thank him on her aunt's behalf for the help he had given. But the unmistakable ring of challenge in his voice was too much for her perverse nature. It was a tense moment and, standing face to face, their breaths quickened. She would goad this man to fury, this she determined, and she was sensitive enough of her powers to imagine that she could turn his fury to impotence.

"I see nothing to be satisfied about, Mr. Barrington. I don't want to take any of the congratulations which should be given to you and Miss Ryder."

The word "congratulations" stung Cleeve. He drew a step nearer, his eyes ablaze. The look and the suddenness of his movement unnerved her. She put out her hand as if to ward him off. It touched his arm, and then quietly and determinedly as in the lull before the storm he began to speak. The words came out deliberately.

"Congratulations, Miss Yvonne! Who spoke of congratulations?" His hand fastened on the arm which was touching him and his face was close up against hers. Under the spur of his grip she tossed her head with an air of disdain. He looked a splendid fighter, a man who would not be balked of his purpose. . . . Neither would she be balked!

"Yes, congratulations!" She shook off his hand and, taking two quick steps backward, made a low mocking curtsey. "Congratulations to you and Miss Ryder!" As she spoke she bowed her head with a demure look of assumed meekness and then raising it quickly, she added: "If I were a man I'd have sufficient courage to follow up my quarry, but I suppose you will deny there was any meaning in what I saw and heard and try to make out you were only playing kiss in the ring. If so, I fancy I shall shortly hear the cock crow thrice."

Her beautiful lips added a sneer to her taunt, and throwing back her head, her nostrils dilated. The challenge was in her eyes now.

"You defy me," he said. "There was a sneer in your taunt that you would not begin where others left off, and as you are so fond of the Scriptures, may I ask is thy

servant a dog that he should be lashed by your tongue and come to heel at your beck and call, or lie quiet and wag his tail because it pleases you to say nothing to him the whole afternoon? I hate you! . . . No, I lie! . . . I love you . . . that is, I love the picture you present, the rest of you doesn't count!"

Yvonne threw back her head still further and gave a derisive little laugh. She was a girl no longer, but a woman stirred by something inside her, the existence of which she had been previously unaware.

"Yes, my servant is a dog," and bending low she snapped her fingers at the level of her knees and called sweetly in a coaxing, mocking voice: "Come here, little doggie, come here and die for 'Queen Muriel'!"

"Doggie" did die, or rather, was transformed into a furious human tiger. In one quick sudden movement he gripped her and before she could move his arm encircled her waist, his face buried itself in her white slender neck and she felt his hot lips burning into her flesh. With a strength born of suppressed anger and the wish to humiliate, he drew her closely to him, holding her so tightly she could hardly breathe. The climax was at hand. He turned her head towards him slowly and deliberately, heedless of the force he had to exert to overcome her resistance, and, placing his lips on hers, kissed them passionately. For a few seconds she lay inanimate in his arms, and if Cleeve Barrington could have seen into her eyes their look would have checked his rough passionate embrace. It might have been better for them both if he had seen, but her eyes were apparently closed, and he was too blind to see. A second later it was too late, for she suddenly felt the shame, the indignity of it all, and in a tide of anger, which gave her additional strength, she broke from his embrace, and the next moment he felt a stinging blow on his cheek. ,

The blow would have brought most men to their senses, but Cleeve's passion had been lashed to fury and that blow only served to further inflame him. On freeing herself, she made no attempt to run away. She stood facing him, as a tigress faces its mate; and Cleeve, without realising what he was doing, rained a blow with each hand on either side of her face before he could stop himself. She gave a

little cry, her hands went up to her face, and with broken pride she buried her bowed head in the upturned palms, while hot tears of shame trickled through her fingers. She had sown a storm and reaped a whirlwind.

In the brief moments which followed Cleeve stood there mutely suffering the torments of hell. He had waited all these years, faithful to her memory, and fate, on the threshold of their second meeting, had dealt him a series of crushing blows. Playing on the love he bore his mother, it had sent him the silent message of her dying wish; had revealed its cloven hoof in the postscript "Muriel and Alice are here," sent one, whose image was graven on his heart to witness an avowal which was a sacrilege against the ideals of his love. And now, oh God! he had struck "her" in the blindness of his outraged feelings.

For one fleeting second he was tempted to take the slim, bent figure of Yvonne in his arms and, throwing himself on her mercy, implore her forgiveness. Tempted to tell her he had not known what he was doing and that he was consumed by a greater feeling of self-loathing and contempt than she could ever understand; tempted to tell her that in spite of all that could be said to the contrary, the fact remained that what he had done had been done in love, but a love so strong and virile that it had overwhelmed him, a love so intense that to goad it were mere madness, for in the intensity of its flaming passion even honour and self-respect could melt. But he did none of these things, for they were foreign to his nature. He came from a stock whose ancestors in bygone days fought for their women and with savage instincts held what the sword had given them. Standing there irresolute, those inbred savage instincts rose from their dead ashes and whispered that there was no real shame in taming the spirit of the woman he loved, that he had the exulting consolation that he had held her tightly in his arms, and nothing else mattered, not even the barrier his acts had placed between them.

Then it was that Yvonne, with her hands still before her face, made a few hesitating steps towards the door but, as the apology she was waiting for continued to be withheld, she suddenly dropped her hands and turned towards him

once more. Her cheeks were scarlet, showing that the blows had been no light ones, the tears were still in her eyes, but there was no sign of the broken girl of a few seconds before as she flung her words at him. "I suppose I must put up with the chivalry of the stables when I come in contact with certain members of a hunting fraternity, Mr. Barrington," and with this cutting rebuke she turned her back on Cleeve Barrington and left the room.

Yvonne's shaft missed its mark; Cleeve Barrington could suffer the torments of hell for one who had a claim on his pity, but what Yvonne's tears created Yvonne's taunt dispelled. His anger and indignation were rekindled by the cutting sarcasm of her remark, and he gave vent to words which he devoutly hoped would reach her ears.

Whatever remorse Cleeve had momentarily experienced completely vanished with that reference to the stables. In the blindness of his anger he could see no injustice in what he had done. He was a good lover and a good hater and his hate was now so great that he was ashamed of what he considered the weakness which had caused him those torments of hell. "What right had she to stand and listen to the avowal which fate had thrust upon him? She had no love for him!" . . . and the look she had given him when at that dance five years ago she had told him "there would never be another" was self-evidence of her want of feeling. . . . "right!" he ejaculated. "She has no right at all!" He was too angry to consider what he had thrown away,—the chance of winning her love. But not too angry to ask himself if he had wronged her. "Wronged her?" As the words formed in his brain he gave an exultant, satirical laugh and his exultation rose at the thought that his kisses had spoken about other things than love, at the thought that her yielding body had provided a keyboard on which the messengers of his mind had played the tune she deserved. But what he did not know, unfortunately for his future peace of mind, was that they had played such a crescendo of sublime passion that a garden of Eden, with all its nakedness, had been created for them both. . . . No, he had not wronged her! It would

not have mattered if he had! All that mattered was that he had wronged himself, wronged his love, the love he'd held so pure! He had a feeling of divine satisfaction at the thought that he would never be forgiven for those blows, he did not want forgiveness. There was nothing to forgive.

CHAPTER V

“MRS. DE HAVILAND would like to know, madame, if you’re coming down to tea?”

“No, I’m too tired, Cécile, I want to be left alone until it’s time to dress for dinner,” and as an excuse for keeping her face hidden until her maid had departed Yvonne crossed over to the writing-table in the window and, unlocking her dressing-case, took out her journal.

She was angry with herself for giving way to her emotions. “What would Cécile think if she saw I’d been crying?” she murmured to herself.

Yvonne had been brought up to consider that any expression of emotion except a simulated one should be suppressed; and that it was only “ ’Arry and ’Arriet” who showed their real feelings.

Until Cécile’s advent she had been too indignant and angry to sense any other feelings than those which outraged modesty implant, but now she felt ashamed of herself. What would Mr. Barrington think of her behaviour? He was probably gloating over her exhibition of weakness. Oh, how she wished she had stood still while he struck those blows and unflinchingly looked him up and down until he sensed the shame of his action, and then her remark,—“I suppose I must put up with the chivalry of the stables when I come in contact with certain members of a hunting fraternity,”—would have been ever so much more cutting. But this thought gave her no satisfaction; she had not done it, had not hidden her feelings. Perhaps that was why he had treated her like that. He had seen through her artificial bearing, and, at the first opportunity, had torn away the flimsy veil which hid her human weakness.

Why was her punishment always kisses? She supposed she must look like a *débaucheuse* who wanted them. She

recalled a conversation she had overheard at the Three Arts Ball five years ago. . . . She was dancing with Mr. Barrington at the time, and as she passed a rather elderly couple she heard the woman say, "You don't seem able to take your eyes off that girl, who is she? Do you know her?" . . . "No, I don't," was the man's emphatic reply, "and I wouldn't like to! She'd tempt a saint with those eyes and that colouring." Oh, how those words had eaten into her soul. She had never been able to forget them; for as she had turned to the rhythm of the music she had glanced at her partner's face and from its expression she was certain he, too, had heard. A certainty which, to her, became more certain when he eagerly pressed her to give him another dance. She had not forgotten how he seemed to bend over her as he made the request and the excited look in his eyes; nor her feeling that if he hadn't been in the ballroom he would have kissed her neck.

She remembered that even in her school days the boys were always wanting to kiss her in preference to the other girls, and when they did kiss her they always hugged her more than they seemed to hug the others. "Perhaps it was," she reflected, "because her mother was French and French women were so wickedly beautiful and made men feel wicked too."

Yvonne had taken out her journal intending to write it up to date, but these thoughts drove that intention from her mind. She was in no mood to write, and locking it away she crossed over to the mirror and gazed pensively at her reflection. The image in the glass reflected a tall, slim figure with a small head poised regally on a slender white neck, and crowned with a mass of chestnut hair reflecting copper lights here and there as its natural waves caught the rays of the afternoon sun. The face, heart-shaped, with its somewhat rounded, rather prominent chin, was of a clear creamy colour, which threw into relief the dark eyebrows, the curling lashes and the rather wide mouth, with its deliciously curved full red lips. The dainty white dress with its long simple lines emphasised the youthfulness of her figure, and the flimsy whiteness of the sparingly used exquisite lace round the rather low-cut neck only

served to render more fair by comparison the bare neck and sloping shoulders.

"Yes," Yvonne nodded to her reflection, "you're very pretty, my dear, and very French, I won't pretend you're not! And as it appears to be your fate to provoke nothing but beastly passions I won't try to stop things any longer. You shall fulfil your despicable destiny."

She whispered the last sentence almost inaudibly with her eyes fixed on the red mark below her ear where Cleeve's fingers had pressed as his lips lingered on hers. And as she thought of that kiss her eyes sparkled and some of her anger and self-loathing disappeared, but its disappearance was followed by a flush of shame as she recalled the outraged feelings his embrace had conjured, a flush which deepened at the thought that she had interrupted him in the act of doing the same thing to Muriel Ryder. She would have a talk with Miss Ryder and tell her what a brute, a beast, Mr. Barrington was. No! she wouldn't, she hated the girl even more than she hated him! Brute and beast that he was for holding her like that! She supposed that was how he would have held Muriel had she given him a little more time, held anyone like that who was willing to kiss him with an abandon equal to his own. But he had one redeeming point, he had some sense of manliness, he hadn't kissed her again. She owed him a little gratitude for that. His blows had lowered her, but not half so much as his embrace. A cad would have kissed her again and not hit her back. No, he was not a cad, and at the recollection of the way she had goaded him a smile of satisfaction parted her lips.

"Yes," she murmured half aloud, "I goaded him, I wanted to see him roused and he didn't disappoint me! Only he went too far. I suppose men always do,—that is, real men, when you goad them. I wonder what it is about Mr. Barrington that made me want to rouse him. I knew he'd kiss me, I saw the longing in his eyes. And now that I really know my own character I'll make him want to kiss me again, but he never shall! No, and he'll never know how exquisitely delicious his kisses were—I don't mind saying it now—that is, until——" She shook her head as though she could not quite express her thoughts.

“But I’ll be even with you yet, Mr. Barrington. If I’m the kind of girl men always want to kiss it’ll be easy to make you want to kiss me again, and then I’ll snap my fingers in your face and let you see how really mean you are.”

If she was made for stirring man’s passions,—for that was what his kisses had told her,—he would get to love her, she thought, when he found there was no chance of winning her. Men were like that, they wanted most what they couldn’t get. She would make him feel about her like that. She would make him want to kiss her again, make him love her, and then she would laugh at him and tell him she would rather not marry an overgrown stable boy. She knew such a thrust would get home, it was so untrue. She gave a little ironical laugh at the inaptness of the insinuation. He was tall and slim, with broad shoulders, and there was nothing servile about him, but if she couldn’t convince him that he resembled that uncouth being, well, what was the good of having a face like hers with that colouring and that figure? Yes, she would make him pay for that embrace and those blows, but more particularly for that embrace!

CHAPTER VI

“YVONNE, my dear, I’m really cross with you!” Mrs. de Haviland, assuming an expression of sternness at variance with her real feelings, closed the door of Yvonne’s bedroom and crossed to where her niece stood in front of the dressing-table fingering the cut glass stopper of a bottle of eau de Cologne.

“I thought you were going to rest until tea time,” she continued chidingly. “And now I hear that you and Cleeve Barrington have been decorating the ballroom together.”

“Who told you, Aunt Eloise?” Yvonne inquired in a slightly mutinous voice.

Mrs. de Haviland turned and settled herself comfortably in an armchair before replying. Her lips were twitching with suppressed amusement, and until she had control over her feelings she did not trust herself to speak. When at last she did reply to Yvonne’s question her voice sounded almost indifferent.

“When you didn’t come down for tea I asked Wilson to find you, but Cleeve Barrington said he didn’t think you would come as you were tired after the work you had done with him and he’d sent you off to bed. In fact, he rather conveyed the impression that he had mapped out your programme for you.”

An angry flush suffused Yvonne’s face.

“What business is it of Mr. Barrington to discuss my movements? I didn’t tell him I was tired; I came here to avoid him. He takes a great deal too much on himself!”

“Why, Yvonne, you’re very excited! I do hope you’re not going to have a headache. Let me feel your forehead.”

Mrs. de Haviland rose as she spoke, and placing her hand gently on Yvonne’s brow, gave her a searching look.

“My dear, I do believe you’ve been crying.”

Yvonne turned her face away resentfully.

"I've more cause to be angry, Aunt Eloise."

For a moment Mrs. de Haviland remained silent, striving to put two and two together; that something out of the common had happened that afternoon she had no doubt. What was Cleeve Barrington's reckless banter hiding? Why had Muriel Ryder absented herself until sent for? Why that spirit of contrition when she did come? And what was the cause of Yvonne's tears and her spirit of rebellion?

"Lie down for a little, Yvonne, and I'll stay and talk to you until you go to sleep."

Yvonne moved reluctantly towards the bed, and sitting on it, drew her legs up and curled them under her.

Mrs. de Haviland followed her and stood irresolutely at the foot of the bed.

"Of course, if you'd rather not talk I'll go."

Yvonne jumped up quickly, the rebellious look in her eyes replaced by one of repentance.

"Come and sit down, Aunt Eloise, I *am* a little beast! But Mr. Barrington has upset me very much this afternoon."

"You mustn't let him upset you, Yvonne, he's the dearest man really, only so easily misunderstood. Rather curiously, he is the very man I want to talk to you about. I've already told you, I think, that he has been educated for a political career, haven't I?"

"Yes," replied Yvonne with studied indifference.

"Well, my dear, we want to get him nominated as the Conservative candidate, only we've got to get him married first. We're all very fond of Cleeve, but he is so tiresome! He never seeks any girl's society for long, and the reason, I think, is because he has too high an ideal." Mrs. de Haviland paused and gave a little sigh, which developed into a cough as Yvonne hailed her last remark with a sound suspiciously like a snort.

"He is not aware of the subtleties of our sex," Mrs. de Haviland continued. "He becomes attracted, as all men do, by a pretty face. He takes little notice of any girl who hasn't one! To a pretty face he fits an ideal character and proceeds to cultivate a rather too intimate acquaintanceship. The reckless impetuosity of his nature drives

him perhaps to say more than he should before he finds out that the face and the character don't agree. It is the character he is groping after all the time, but his methods are wrong. They are the methods of an individual who judges a book by its outside cover. You'll wonder why I am telling you all this, Yvonne, but I know how you love making people happy, and you can help to make Cleeve Barrington happy, if you will?"

Indignant words rose to Yvonne's lips, but she prudently checked them, while she strove to discover the meaning of her aunt's remarks. Could it be that Aunt Eloise expected *her* to marry him?

"What do you want me to do?" she demanded cautiously, mentally rehearsing the scathing speech she would deliver when her aunt disclosed the object of her visit. She supposed Cleeve Barrington had spoken to Aunt Eloise and by some subtlety, which the male sex possessed, had persuaded her to smooth the way for a proposal. He was just the sort of man who could propose to half a dozen girls between tea and dinner time, she told herself, 'just that sort which wants most what it can't get!'

"Well, Yvonne, I don't suppose you've noticed yet, but Cleeve is at the moment attracted by Muriel Ryder, and really I think she would make him a good wife. His mother likes the girl and his father looks on her, perhaps not with approval, but, with tolerance, the tolerance born of an anxiety to see Cleeve married. Colonel Barrington is ambitious, he wants to see his son a political power in the world and knows marriage is essential. I know Muriel Ryder very well, she's one of those girls who would not marry unless sure of a man's love, and in making sure would waste so much time that the chances are her prize would slip from her grasp. A little jealousy might temper her caution. Judging by Cleeve's manner, I think he is also a little attracted by you. It wouldn't be a bad thing just to encourage him a little. He can't marry you, dear, so it can't do any harm. In a fortnight you will have gone, and he will have forgotten his infatuation—if he develops any—meanwhile it will arouse Muriel's jealousy and then, when he does propose, she'll be only too ready to accept him, if I am any judge of these things. You see, Yvonne,

we've all got to help our own sex in these affairs, and you'll get your reward for acting as a foil in the happiness you'll bring to them both."

For a moment Yvonne did not answer. Relief that she had not given herself away to her aunt was quickly followed by a feeling of furious anger at having so misunderstood her words, a feeling which was considerably augmented by the thought of the part her aunt wished her to play. She leant forward, her usually pale face crimson with anger, and before she could check them the passionate words were out: "A foil to help *him*? I hate Mr. Barrington more than *anyone* in this world!"

Mrs. de Haviland raised her eyebrows, hopeful that she would now hear the cause of her niece's anger and tears. "I'm afraid, my dear, you take him too seriously."

"Aunt Eloise, I do nothing of the kind," said Yvonne stormily. "Neither Mr. Barrington nor any other man has any business to commence a proposal to one girl in the afternoon and then turn round to me as I was leaving the room and say, 'I'll get you yet, you little she devil.'"

It was well for Mrs. de Haviland's schemes that she had schooled herself to hide her emotions, otherwise the pleasure and excitement she experienced, had they been revealed, might have given Yvonne some inkling of her aunt's real intentions.

"What are you talking about, Yvonne? Am I to believe that Cleeve has already proposed to Muriel? It couldn't be Alice, for I purposely kept her with me all the afternoon."

"Well," Yvonne continued indignantly, "if it wasn't a proposal it was very nearly one."

Mrs. de Haviland's curiosity was aroused, but she was too wary to put further questions. Besides, she was not the kind of woman to indulge a thirst for unnecessary information when the iron was hot and waiting to be struck. She saw a hidden jealousy in Yvonne's words, and, believing that a few faggots thrown on the fire of that jealousy would do much, to consummate the attainment of her ends, she stifled her curiosity and proceeded to pile them on.

"I'm afraid, my dear, you were very unwise not to come and lie down earlier. I purposely kept Alice Ryder with

me so that Cleeve and Muriel could be together. It's time he married, and he's ruining his chances by not doing so. Rumour is much too busy with his affairs. The women's committee have not yet decided to support him. They fear some scandal; some skeleton in the cupboard when it comes to an election. You know, Yvonne, dear, how our political opponents pry into past history."

She paused and looked at Yvonne's flushed face appreciatively. What a little firebrand she looked with her angry, sparkling eyes and compressed, mutinous lips! Of what was she thinking? Suddenly the motherly instincts of Mrs. de Haviland were aroused, she seemed to sense the mental torture which those mutinous lips reflected, and the meaning of those earlier tears which anger had replaced. Her schemes faded from her mind in the flood of love which welled up in her heart, and putting her arms round Yvonne's neck, she kissed her tenderly.

"I'm going now, dear, do try and get a little sleep. I want to be proud of my little niece to-night, she mustn't come down with great big, tired eyes."

Yvonne threw herself on the bed and, lying down, relaxed her body and closed her eyes. Her head seemed whirling with the chaos of thoughts in her mind. So this was the man she had idealised for all those years—a man who had some skeleton in the cupboard, a man whom the women's committee were fearful of approving lest a scandal should come to light! A man from whom you only had to keep one sister for him to propose to the other. How she wished she had not overheard his words to Muriel Ryder. Unconsciously she allowed her mind to recall each incident of the afternoon and then suddenly she blushed and turned her face to the wall.

CHAPTER VII

MRS. DE HAVILAND was in the reception room awaiting her guests when the door opened and the footman announced Mrs. Courtney.

The great intimacy and companionship which existed between the two was evidenced by their warm greeting.

"It's so good of you to hurry down. I hardly expected it after your late arrival, Helen," said Mrs. de Haviland, when she and her friend were seated, "but I do so want a chat with you before we're disturbed. Yvonne arrived this morning, very tired after her journey, but she and Cleeve Barrington have met and, if there is any meaning in the rebellious air which she's assumed, I should say she's not absolutely indifferent to him."

Helen Courtney had a weak spot in her heart for Cleeve, and if Dame Rumour's statements had any truth in them, she had once had a weaker spot for his father.

"You say that, Eloise, as if an attachment between them would give you great pleasure, yet some time ago, if I remember rightly, you told me Yvonne was not free to marry. You know, dear, I never seek confidences, but I cannot help thinking that Yvonne has made a *mésalliance*."

Mrs. de Haviland held up her hand as though about to speak.

"No, Eloise, I don't want you to confide in me. I don't want to know what's at the back of Yvonne's trouble, but I can't see why you want to drag in Cleeve Barrington; you know how dangerous married women are when they are young, attractive and unhappily married. And you also know Cleeve's reckless nature. Richard says 'he's the sort of man who'd go to the devil to get anything he'd really set his heart on, and raise Cain if there were any difficulty from that quarter.' I've not seen Yvonne, but

if she is as attractive as you make out and as high-spirited, he might become over-attracted. I don't think Cleeve's been attracted by anyone so far—not really attracted—and if he were no one can say how far he'd go. Personally I shouldn't like to see him on the track of a married woman. 'There'd be skin and hair flying about,' as his father is so fond of saying, before very long, and, Eloise, you would regret it all your life if he took it seriously."

"Helen, I can't take you into my confidence with regard to Yvonne. The secret is not altogether mine; you understand, don't you, dear? But believe me, Helen, though it may come to nothing, an attraction between Cleeve and Yvonne can do no harm and it might do a lot of good. If it does come to anything, so much the better, for left to herself Yvonne would never break her bonds."

"Eloise, I really don't understand you! It's most unlike you to interfere with anything which doesn't really concern you."

"It concerns me very much, Helen. She's very near and dear to me, but niece or no niece, I don't believe in moral cruelty. No man has any right to so inflict his will on any young thing as to make her a virtual prisoner, and except for an occasional visit, a very occasional visit, to Switzerland, when she goes to stay with a trusted friend of the family, she is a prisoner. It's not fair to keep anyone locked up like that. Why, Helen, this is the first time she has been allowed to come and stay with me. I know of no young girl, married or unmarried, who has to put up with so much and complains so little. A strong attraction on Yvonne's part might lead to the breaking of the bonds. She is too fearful of the consequences and too adverse to hurting other people's feelings to break them without help, and I am determined to break them if I can."

"And create a scandal?"

"Yes."

"Eloise! are you mad? You scheme to get Yvonne down here and make no secret of the part you intend to play. Why, surely you must see how unpleasant it would be for you?"

"If I succeed, as I intend to succeed, it will be more than unpleasant, more than one person with an honoured

name will suffer disgrace. But, Helen, I've given the matter very careful thought, I will not stand idle and see Yvonne's life wrecked."

"But I know someone who took vows which wrecked her life and still held her vows sacred."

"Helen, my case is different. I won't pretend to misunderstand you. When I made my promise before God I was old enough to know what I was doing. Yvonne was a child when she made hers."

Helen Courtney was obviously wavering though still unconvinced. How could she combat her friend's argument? She had not seen Yvonne, did not know all her circumstances, and besides, Eloise was the last person in the world to do anything unjust or to countenance anything really underhand.

Mrs. de Haviland was quick to perceive her momentary advantage. She wanted Helen Courtney on her side, and like a capable general she called up her reserves.

"Besides, Helen, it is not only of Yvonne I'm thinking. Cleeve's future is wrapped up in all this. Both you and I would be very proud to have a son like Cleeve; we wouldn't like to see him drifting?"

"Drifting! Eloise, what d'you mean?"

"Yes, Helen, drifting. Let's be frank with one another for once. Did I marry the man I loved? Did you?"

"Oh, hush, Eloise, hush!"

"Well, do you want Cleeve to follow in our footsteps?"

Mrs. de Haviland leant forward and almost whispered those words.

"No."

"Well, that's where he's drifting. His father's anxious to see him married, his mother too. The importunities of his father carry little weight, and his mother loves him too much to be over-importunate. But I know it is her wish to see him married, and, from a hint she dropped the other day, I fancy she thinks she has not long to live. Believe me, when Mrs. Barrington makes a serious appeal to Cleeve he will be moved by it. As far as I can gather, he's somewhat attracted by Muriel Ryder already; a good enough girl, I'll admit, and an attractive one from some men's point of view, but my dear, she has been fed on the

purity and sanctity of love, and though neither you nor I would belittle either its purity or its sanctity, a spice of the devil is required to preserve those qualities; Muriel Ryder lacks the spice."

"What! Cleeve Barrington *attracted* by Muriel Ryder? I can't believe it, Eloise."

"That of itself would not matter, Helen. The danger does not lie in the attraction, it lies in the love which Cleeve bears his mother and in her wish. Now do you understand me? When I last saw Mrs. Barrington I read a great deal more in the words of that dear lovable woman than she thought she had conveyed. She confides in me more perhaps than she confides in anyone, and I gather that she blames a girl whom Cleeve met at a ball five years ago for his disinclination to marry. Now, Helen, putting two and two together I have come to the conclusion that Cleeve met Yvonne at that ball. I know Yvonne was there and danced with him—if one can rely on descriptions. Now let's face a few facts. If we had our lives to live again would we do what we have done? We say what we are told before the altar and blessings are bestowed on our troth, but in our hearts we know it's mockery! There are no blessings on a loveless marriage. The altar isn't a grocer's shop. Blessings aren't a shilling a pound, two pounds for one-and-tenpence—like jam; there's no half quantities in blessings. But they're purchasable, Helen, all the same, only you've got to pay for two pounds straight off with a joint purse, a purse filled to overflowing with the love of both. If one side of the purse contains love and the other something else, you don't even get one pound of blessings, you get a curse, and . . . 'In sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.' . . . Would you have Cleeve eat of that sorrow? No, Helen, you needn't answer. We who contract these unblessed marriages may still have our romances, but only when we dream. We in the autumn of our lives get no nearer to reality than contact with romance. Contact with the romance of those of the younger generation whom we love. The greater our failure to attain mutual love, the more passionate is our desire to obtain the gift, which we have missed, for others. In my case I want to obtain it for Yvonne. In her happiness

my broken romance will live again. In Cleeve's happiness yours will flicker for a while."

"Eloise, really you surprise me more and more. Richard is all a husband should be! He is . . . "

"Yes, I know, Helen. If you want to deceive yourself you are at liberty to do so, but not to deceive me; our friendship forbids it. We see behind each other's mask, and when the happiness of those we love is at stake I feel it my duty to take mine off and, Helen! oh, *unwilling* Helen! I feel it is also my duty to tear yours away. You loved Cleeve's father, you cannot be indifferent to a son so like him. And there's only one wife for Cleeve. No man could remain faithful all these years to a memory if it were otherwise; and as for Yvonne, she still treasures an old faded dance programme. Helen, we *can't* adopt a complacent attitude over a match between Cleeve and Muriel Ryder. It would be most unsuitable, and after my conversation with Mrs. Barrington I determined to have Yvonne here if only for a few days. If there is any real attraction between the two, Yvonne's bonds may be broken, and a more desirable alliance I cannot imagine. If the bonds cannot be broken, the awakening of an old attraction may still prevent Cleeve from making this great mistake, and if nothing comes of it—well, we must face the inevitable and be prepared to congratulate Cleeve Barrington and Muriel Ryder. Cleeve and Yvonne, as I've already told you, have met! I wrote this morning telling him Yvonne had arrived but was very tired and asked him to come over and help with the decorations, using Muriel as a bait. And would you believe it, my dear, he not only sent the usual polite note, but accompanied it with the verbal communication that he presented his compliments to me and suggested that 'my niece should be put to bed!' Now, Helen, you can see there's some truth in my belief that Cleeve is drifting."

Mrs. Courtney remained silent for a few moments and then, speaking slowly, replied: "Yes, I'm inclined to agree with you, Eloise, that was a hint to keep Yvonne away. Does he know that he danced with her at that ball?"

"As far as I can gather he neither knows who she was

nor her name, but I'm convinced *she* was the attraction. I don't know whether you're prepared to help me in this matter, but I was relying on you, and I think that unless you do, you must countenance the drifting, for once Cleeve really makes up his mind he will brook no interference; it will be too late then. And, Helen, I have reason to believe he nearly proposed to Muriel this afternoon. It's hardly credible, but it's a fact."

"My dear, I'm not going to promise anything until I've seen Yvonne and Cleeve together. I'm not saying that what you've said hasn't influenced me. Mind you, Eloise, my mask as you called it is off for the moment. If Richard were not all that is good and kind I'd have left him long ago. I hope I've hidden from him my true feelings. It's been difficult at times but I've had the consolation that the man I loved, unlike you, did not really love me. It was with him only a passing infatuation. Had he loved me, or had I been married to a brute, Eloise, there's no telling what I might have done. But to promise you my help to free Yvonne—well, Eloise, candidly I rather dread doing such a thing."

"You know what Richard has always said, Helen, about Cleeve going to the devil if his ideals were shattered? And as for me, you know I'd do nothing mean or underhand. I realize the danger of interfering as well as you, but I want you to believe that I'm right in what I'm doing. Cleeve will go wrong if he is allowed to drift, and I'd rather he had a chance to go straight with Yvonne than wrong with Muriel. Whether you help me or not, Helen, I'll not turn back. We all know that the course of true love never did run smooth, but I think the converse is equally true, that where there's attraction between two persons so suited to each other as Yvonne and Cleeve, a woman's brain can make its course so rugged that it develops into the love all seek and so few discover. In this case I'm going to make the course just as rugged as it is possible to make it, before it's too late."

There were footsteps outside and Cleeve Barrington's voice could be heard exchanging a few words with the footman.

A second later, when the door opened to admit him,

Mrs. de Haviland was lying back on the chesterfield with an air of languor which seemed to belie the possibility of the conversation just ended. Helen Courtney could not but admire the look of frank honesty and ingenuousness with which she greeted Cleeve. Another knock at the door followed, and Colonel St. Ledger entered, who, in a somewhat boisterous manner, slapped Cleeve on the back and promptly proceeded to entertain Mrs. Courtney with various racy anecdotes, which did much to shock that lady's somewhat puritanical nature.

In a very short space of time the other diners were announced, and then Yvonne put in a rather late appearance. At her entry the buzz of small talk, which usually accompanies friends greeting one another on these occasions, perceptibly diminished, for every one felt the influence of her presence without being able to ascribe a reason.

Perhaps it was to be found in the fact that Yvonne, at the moment, had a mysterious mixture in her bearing of docility and rebellion—a mixture which always attracts. But as she stood glancing round the room, scanning the many unfamiliar faces, she also conveyed an impression of shy aloofness which in that setting added to her girlish charm, and perhaps that impression entered more forcibly into Cleeve Barrington's mind than any other. The look, however, which she gave when a moment later she condescended to let her glance fall on him, was one of contemptuous disdain.

Mrs. de Haviland, fully conscious of the impression Yvonne was creating, smiled with an amused twinkle in her eyes as she noticed with no little degree of satisfaction that Yvonne had removed the wedding ring from her finger and that in its place—but not on the same finger—reposed an old-fashioned enamel ring with small forget-me-nots in diamonds.

Helen Courtney, too, was fully conscious of the impression Yvonne was creating. She soon detected that she wore no wedding ring and her mind was quickly made up. With a woman's intuition she sensed the tension between the man and the girl, and giving a low chuckle to herself, she seized the opportunity during a moment's babel of conversation to approach Mrs. de Haviland and whisper: "I think, Eloise,

you have already put a few stones in their path and I'll help you to put a few more! I'm glad she's not married."

Mrs. de Haviland gave a little laugh.

"Yes, but it's only the leaven working. She's taken off her wedding ring!"

Mrs. Courtney gasped with dismay. Then Yvonne *was* married, and she had promised to help to entangle Cleeve Barrington with a married woman! She thought of asking Eloise, then and there, to release her from that hastily made promise, but at that moment the butler entered to announce dinner and Mrs. Courtney left the room with the feeling that she had been betrayed.

CHAPTER VIII

MRS. DE HAVILAND, gracefully attired in black charmeuse, stood receiving her guests. The dinner had passed off well, but her look of happiness and satisfaction was not due to the excellence of the cuisine,—that never failed in her household,—but to little things she had observed as the meal progressed. She felt more than ever proud of the rebellious, mutinous figure of Yvonne, now standing beside her in a dress of apple-green tulle which threw into relief the clearness of her complexion and accentuated the whiteness of her throat and shoulders.

Mrs. de Haviland gathered additional satisfaction as she noticed the many glances that Yvonne commanded. They were glances of open admiration not unmixed with covetousness from the men, but critical and envious from the matrons, who scented a dangerous rival to their own matrimonial designs in the young beauty who stood there so apparently unconscious of the charm she exercised. Mrs. de Haviland keenly observed Yvonne's tactics each time she was asked for a dance and gave a little hopeful smile as she heard her replies. Presently Yvonne was talking in an appealing manner to an elderly man who had asked for a dance . . . "she was afraid she hadn't one to give," . . . she passed a pretty compliment which appealed to the soft place in his heart, he bowed and passed on, his beaming face showing no sign of chagrin at the refusal he had sustained. Two or three younger men came up and her manner was even more disarming. "She had so much to do," . . . "she wanted to make her aunt's dance a big success," . . . "but later on she would . . . if they really wanted a dance, like to be asked again." And all the time the light of mischief was in her eyes as she kept them continually trained on the approaching guests, watching for the tall figure and devil-may-care face of Cleeve Bar-

rington; longing for the moment when he would ask her for a dance.

Suddenly she flushed and then gave a little impatient stamp of the foot. She knew she had blushed, and, although a critical observer could only have detected a little added colour in her cheeks, imagined she had turned as red as a peony. Presently the anticipation of victory added a little more colour to her cheeks; Cleeve Barrington was approaching her in an assured, confident manner, advancing gaily to meet his Waterloo. He would bow and mockingly ask her for the favour of a dance, she felt sure.

She read the determination his face expressed; he would take her card and scribble his name down half a dozen times, if she gave him a chance. But she would hold on to that card like grim death! Not a name was written on it, and that exulting knowledge steadied the nervousness which had caused her blushes. She would scan her programme right under his eyes, tell him she was booked up, and then carelessly tuck the card into her dress with the triumphant smile of one who had put Cleeve Barrington in his place.

There he was, bowing to Aunt Eloise with what Yvonne took to be a look of self-satisfied complacency! Now he was moving towards her! Her moment had arrived! His eyes searched hers, and then suddenly, as though cognizant of her intention, he turned his back on her and, giving vent to a scarcely audible chuckle, went straight over to Muriel Ryder!

Yvonne saw him take Muriel's card and write on it rapidly. She glanced at Muriel, who was looking deliciously young and appealing in a simple white dress which enhanced the attraction of her golden hair and made more innocent the expression in her big blue eyes. With a feeling almost of hatred for the girl, Yvonne turned away and saw her aunt greeting a tall young man of about twenty-eight, the muscles of whose face were curiously distorted in an effort to maintain a jauntily poised eye-glass. It was Reggie Cuthbertson, whom Yvonne had met the previous winter when she was staying at Chamonix. She and Reggie had seen quite a lot of one another, and Yvonne had always found him amusing if not intellectually entertaining. To-

night she particularly welcomed him as a friendly being among all that throng of strangers, and, as though making up for lost time and as a salve to her outraged feelings, she booked him three dances without demur.

Presently the dance was in full swing and the dainty frocks of the women as they moved in rhythm to the tantalising throb of the music looked like a parterre of brilliantly coloured flowers that had come to life at the touch of a fairy wand. Yvonne was not long in filling up her programme and as she circled the room with one partner after another she could not stop the working of her brain, which mentally registered each time she saw Cleeve Barrington dancing with Muriel Ryder, and, with that subtle form of retaliation which comes so naturally to women, the higher her resentment rose the more attractive did she strive to make herself to Reggie Cuthbertson, taking as balm to her wounded pride the admiration so plainly expressed by him in his eyes and words.

Her last dance with Reggie was shortly after supper, and as the music died away he led her to a sheltered seat in the Winter Garden beside a large clump of hydrangeas. She sat down hurriedly as her eyes caught sight of Cleeve Barrington smoking a cigarette some little distance away from them. She would not, however, have been prepared to swear it was Cleeve Barrington, for she and Reggie were sitting just under a Chinese lantern and the gloom beyond rendered recognition difficult, but the very thought of Cleeve Barrington aroused the devil in her and she recklessly determined to play on Reggie's undisguised admiration. Had she known what was to be the outcome of this playing she would have curbed the tantalising strain in her nature, but she was in no mood to think of consequences. She was determined to play with fire, and the probability of Cleeve Barrington's presence acted as a lighted match.

She and Reggie had seated themselves sedately enough, and for a few minutes both sought an opening for conversation. It was Reggie who spoke first.

"By jove!" he said, "d'you know this is our last dance, Yvonne? Aren't you going to spare me another?"

"I wish I could, but I haven't another to spare," said Yvonne in a voice which she made purposely audible. The

words were uttered so sweetly and in such a tone of regret that Reggie blinked in astonishment as he gazed at her. He thought he saw an appealing look in her eyes, which were only half hidden by her curling lashes. He sighed, and suddenly roused himself as he realised he was in danger of becoming sentimental—he had been snubbed by Yvonne once before and was, in consequence, somewhat cautious. Striving to exhibit an air of jocularly he was far from feeling, he replied: "Well, it's been awfully jolly seeing you again. Quite like old times, eh, what? Dancing together and the jolly old band beatin' away!"

"Yes, it was an awfully pleasant surprise to see you, Reggie. Aunt Eloise never told me you were coming. It seems ages since we were at Chamonix, doesn't it?"

"By jove, it does. I say, old thing, you do look topping in that dress! Prettiest little kid in the room, that's what you are."

Yvonne winced and devoutly hoping that the word "kid" had not been overheard, hurriedly replied: "Nonsense, Reggie dear, you don't really mean that!" laying stress on the "dear" in the hope of stirring Reggie's well-known sentimentality.

"Don't I! I jolly well do! You know, Yvonne, I was awfully sick to find you had left Chamonix without giving me your address. The beastly place seemed awfully dull without you. I missed you horribly."

"Did you, Reggie? That was very sweet of you," said Yvonne, laying her hand gently on his arm, now quite satisfied at the thought that the conversation had fallen into an unmistakably affectionate channel.

"Do you remember that rose you gave me one night from a bunch you were wearing? . . . Well, I've got it still." Then, seeing Yvonne's look of laughing incredulity, he sighed portentously and said: "It's a fact!"

"But it must be quite withered and falling to pieces by now. I'll give you one of these carnations," said Yvonne, taking a white one from the bunch she was wearing and leaning towards him, she began to pin it in the lapel of his coat, purposely prolonging her task, quite aware of the sense of excitement the nearness of her presence was causing him. The perfume of her hair as it touched his cheek

filled Reggie with rising passion which he strove manfully to suppress.

"Mustn't let the pace get too fast," he thought. But Yvonne was in no hurry to finish pinning in the flower; the sound of a chair being pushed back, followed by footsteps, caught her ears, and quickly she turned her face to Reggie. The witchery of her caressing smile as it momentarily parted her lips, which were so close to his, proved too much for his good resolutions, and he bent swiftly and kissed her just as someone drew level with them. She looked up defiantly to see Cleeve Barrington's towering figure. Then all her defiance vanished and she suddenly felt like crying as she saw the pained, reproachful look he gave her. She felt ashamed of herself, and, with that strange sense of injustice which sometimes moves people when their object is attained, she rose, and standing before the self-satisfied Reggie, appalled him with the cry: "How dare you do that to me! Is there no such thing as friendship between a man and woman? Must men's horrid kisses always come in and spoil everything?"

"Oh, I say, Yvonne!" said Reggie plaintively, "don't be hard on a chap! I just lost my head for a moment. I——"

"Is that your excuse! You just lost your head for a moment! Is that your only apology?"

Reggie, nervously fingering the flower in his coat and unknowingly crushing it in his hand, replied: "My dear girl, I didn't mean to upset you. After all, there's no harm in a kiss; half the girls you meet nowadays expect you to kiss them and are disappointed if you don't."

Holding herself erect and with increased hauteur, Yvonne cuttingly remarked: "And what, may I ask, have I ever done to make you think that I am *that* sort of girl? Have I ever implied that your kisses would be acceptable to me?"

"Of, course you haven't, but, after all, old thing, I do admire you a thundering lot and if I thought there was a chance of your marrying me I'd——"

"Marry you!" said Yvonne scornfully. "Marry you! I think you're perfectly horrible! Men always spoil everything; they're all beasts without exception. You're the

second man who's done this to me to-day. Now you know why I hate you all!"

Reggie jumped up. It was no wonder she was in such a fury, he thought bitterly, that other man had spoilt his whole evening. Yvonne was not really furious with him, she was only giving vent to pent-up wrath.

"And did he want to marry you?" he said. "Because if he didn't I'll jolly well go and knock his bally head off! Who is he?"

Yvonne turned on him so suddenly that he fell back on the seat.

"He's someone who doesn't add insult to injury, Mr. Cuthbertson!"

"Add insult to injury," murmured Reggie dazedly. "What d'you mean?"

"He didn't propose marriage when he knew I resented his kisses," she retorted furiously. "Why, if I had to take my choice, I'd rather marry the other man than you!" and with that retort Yvonne walked quickly away from him and into the house.

"Phew-w-w!" Reggie whistled as he mopped his brow. "What a little spitfire! Devilish pretty she looked though. Suppose it wasn't quite the bally thing to kiss her, but you know, just between me and myself, she almost seemed to ask for it. Seemed so jolly pleased to see me and all that. Gave me a lot of dances and this flower." He surveyed it ruefully. "And when she looked up at me and smiled, well, what could a fellow do?" and Reggie stared steadily at the ground as though awaiting a reply, and none being forthcoming, he rose muttering: "Jolly natural, that's what I say!" and sauntered off in search of a drink.

Meanwhile Cleeve Barrington, re-entering the ball room, felt as if the picture of Yvonne with Reggie's arm round her waist and his kiss on her lips was stamped with hot irons on his brain. He had idealised her memory for five years! Five wasted years! If he had not had her image in his heart he would most certainly have loved and perhaps married one of the many charming girls he had met during that long interval of time. He was filled with contempt for himself at the thought that he had been tricked by

Yvonne's charm of manner and beauty of face and figure into thinking she must bear an ideal character. Ideal! There was nothing ideal about a girl who could goad one man into kissing her in the afternoon and then lay herself out to entice another man to do the same thing a few hours later. No! He had been living in a dream all these years and now the dream had vanished. He would waste no more time on regrets and imaginings, and as soon as possible he would ask Muriel to be his wife. She was a good sweet girl, and if she accepted him it would make his mother happy. He experienced a fierce satisfaction at the thought that possibly Yvonne would be hurt to hear of his engagement.

Presently something prompted him to re-visit the scene of "dashed hopes"; he retraced his steps, and suddenly started as, gazing abstractedly into the gloom of the Winter Garden, he perceived a slim figure seat herself with a tired, weary gesture. It was Yvonne. She felt very tired and longed for a little solitude to analyse her thoughts after the experiences she had been through. She could not remember a day quite like this and she felt rather bewildered as she tried to recall the conversations and actions of the two men who had outraged her sense of pride.

"I suppose Reggie is quite right; half the girls nowadays do expect to be kissed at a dance and would be disappointed if they weren't. That must be what Aunt Eloise means when she says that Cleeve is spoilt by everyone round here.

"What a shame they've spoilt him, I should think that if a man like Cleeve had not been spoilt,—by kisses I mean,—he'd have been as true as steel. I suppose men just go on kissing until they find one whose kisses they like better than anyone else's and then promptly propose, and I suppose they just hate ordinary kisses as much as we do. Sort of trial by ordeal, I suppose, but I call it a revolting way of choosing a wife. And why is it always on the lips? I've never wanted to kiss anyone, and certainly not on the lips. 'No, Yvonne, that's a lie!' she found herself saying. 'You did kiss Cleeve, you know you did, and it was just heaven until—until you remembered he had kissed Muriel.' I hate the way they all slobber over him! They don't seem like girls, with their 'Oh, Mr.

Barrington, I have enjoyed the dance, our steps do go so well together,' and 'I am cross with you, Mr. Barrington, you've never asked me for a dance.' Just as though he had nothing else to do but pander to their wants and amusements. They've just spoilt him with their sloppy compliments!"

"Oh, I've found you. How nice of you to be waiting for me here in this quiet place."

Yvonne's thoughts were thus suddenly interrupted by the advent of Colonel St. Ledger.

"I don't feel like dancing. I'd much rather have a nice little chat with you," he continued, "and I know you'd rather. By the way, I've just heard you're married; is it true? Grass widow, eh? He! He! He!"

Yvonne rose from the chair on which she was sitting. Her inclination was to leave this horrible little man, but she was restrained by the knowledge that he was a guest in her aunt's house.

"Oh, no! you little fascinating minx, you're not going to get me to dance, I'm much too tired and I want to talk to you about ghosts again! He! he! he!"

"Come along, Miss Yvonne," stress was laid on the word "Miss." "I'm not tired, in fact I was just looking for a partner, and Mrs. de Haviland sent me to see if you were getting plenty of dances," and with this obvious lie from Cleeve Barrington's lips, Yvonne, her arm imprisoned in his, found herself being escorted towards the ballroom.

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Barrington, behaving like this! You know you have me at a disadvantage; I can't very well create a scene in my aunt's house! It was Colonel St. Ledger's dance, and I suppose I can sit it out with him if I like?"

"Yes, if you like, Miss Yvonne, but not if you don't like."

"I think I'm quite capable of looking after myself, Mr. Barrington."

"Yes, but you'd have had to snub him and I thought I'd save you the trouble."

"No trouble, I assure you! I've had so much practice lately that it comes quite naturally."

"But there are some snubs which are only given at the

expense of one's self-respect, and I think I have saved you from giving one of that kind."

"I wish you had shown the same regard for my feelings earlier in the afternoon."

"Earlier in the evening, I suppose you mean? Well, I nearly did, only you looked 'such a jolly little kid,' if I may borrow an expression from Reggie Cuthbertson."

They were on the point of entering the ball room as he finished speaking, and the band suddenly crashed out the opening bars of the valse "Destiny." They both came to a sudden halt and Yvonne, who had just begun an effective retort to his remark, relapsed into silence. It was the same valse they had danced to at the Three Arts Ball. Yvonne looked at his face, its expression suddenly changed; it was not quite a wince he gave, only a hardly perceptible expression of astonishment. For a moment or two neither of them made any effort to move.

"Do you remember?" The words were whispered, but they rolled with an unmistakable caress from his lips, and her antipathy evaporated.

"Yes."

"Then let us pay for the remembrance by forgetting something."

"Is that necessary?"

"Everything has to be paid for; every gain is something lost, it's all barter in this world."

"And now you want to barter with me?"

"No, with fate."

"And what do *you* want to forget?"

"All that has happened since that dance five years ago."

"You want me to forget about Miss Ryder and the other thing?"

"Yes, and I will forget about the jolly young bean and the other thing."

"Do you want to? Very much?" She looked up at him wistfully.

"Yes, dear."

He bent over her and she, feeling anxious at the thrill of happiness she experienced, murmured: "Very well, but only for this dance, not for always. Do you agree?"

"I'll agree to anything."

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Mrs. Courtney entered Mrs. de Haviland's room rather late the next morning, the latter was having her breakfast in bed.

"Good morning, Helen, you find me in an extremely lazy mood, my dear!"

"I couldn't rest, Eloise—I thought I'd feel better after a talk with you," Mrs. Courtney explained, as she seated herself in a chair near the bed.

"I'm glad you've come, I'm dying to have a chat with you; did you keep your eyes open last night, Helen? . . . Cleeve's cards are on the table face upwards and as for Yvonne, she didn't book a single dance until Cleeve appeared on the scene. Did you notice that little flush on her face? . . . I did; it was ever so faint but her eyes told me all I wished to know; so when he came up, shook hands and asked me for a dance I just passed him on to my niece and then purposely turned my back on them. . . . It's a case of the magnet and the steel, Helen."

Helen smiled, but it was a wan and wistful smile.

"Yes, my dear, it is a case of the magnet and the steel, but mark me, Eloise, the magnet is repelling the steel."

"What *do* you mean?" Mrs. de Haviland paused in the act of buttering a small square of toast and stared at her friend in surprise.

"Well, Eloise, in the first place Cleeve did *not* ask Yvonne for a dance, he just walked up as though he were determined to book the whole programme and then suddenly turned his back on her, and without speaking a word went straight over to Muriel Ryder; and, Eloise, if I'm any judge of expressions, there's no love lost between Yvonne and Cleeve."

"I don't believe that!" said Mrs. de Haviland, and it was evident from the tone of her voice, the look in her eyes,

and the flush on her cheeks, that Helen Courtney's very positive opinion was causing Mrs. de Haviland considerable perturbation.

Mrs. Courtney was almost struck dumb by her friend's vehement contradiction. Throughout a friendship which began in their schooldays Helen Courtney had rarely seen Mrs. de Haviland show any outward signs of agitation. She had known many a storm rage in Eloise's mind and heart, and had admired the imperturbable serenity of countenance with which those storms had been met. She had seen her go through the ceremony of a loveless marriage without the quiver of an eyelid.

A vision of Eloise standing on the spacious lawn of an old-world garden receiving the congratulations of the many friends who truly loved her flashed on Helen Courtney's mind. . . . A tall girlish figure in white satin, acknowledging with a smile congratulations which were knife thrusts in her heart. . . . A virginal queen by the side of a short round figure of a man about forty, with an unhealthily pale face, out of which shone light brown menacing eyes outlined by sandy coloured lashes.

She recalled the surprise visit she had paid her friend on the honeymoon and another vision was pictured in her mind. A girl bowed and bent; her head propped up on her left arm and hand, a half-written letter on the table, the pen held loosely between her fingers and hot, bitter tears which could not be checked, trickling down her cheeks. It was Eloise, but it was Eloise alone with her grief, her spirit temporarily broken by the acts of a cruel fate. She had just made her sacrifice, and it was for her mother's health and comfort she had made it. Helen Courtney had guessed the purport and destination of that letter, and had since heard a whisper that it was still treasured by a great-hearted man who had been too poor to claim her friend's love at the time.

Helen Courtney recalled how, noiselessly, she had entered Eloise's room, how, noiselessly, she had left, and remembered how when she saw Eloise a few hours later she was again the friend she knew, the charming sweet Eloise of happy countenance.

Suddenly Mrs. Courtney's reflections were brought to an end, for almost as quickly as Mrs. de Haviland's agitation had arisen, it subsided, and with a voice now well under control she commenced to speak.

"Forgive me, Helen, for contradicting you like that; I was upset by the thought of the possibility of another tragedy," and then as though desirous of putting away an unwelcome mood, she turned her head towards the window and stared at the garden thoughtfully, a frown wrinkling her forehead.

There was an oppressive silence, a silence which Helen hesitated to break, and so she waited patiently for the outcome of her friend's thoughts. In those few brief moments she realised that Yvonne's future was a part of her friend's life, realised that Eloise was coming to a decision which might alter for ever the rôle she intended to play.

Quietly, and as though in another world, Mrs. de Haviland spoke, very deliberately and slowly.

"Yes, Helen, I do believe it, because *you* have said so. I would not have been so upset over what you have told me, only I'm fighting against time. I've told you that Cleeve very nearly proposed to Muriel yesterday. In itself that's nothing, a miss is as good as a mile, as the saying goes, and if time were not a factor in the case I should regard the incident merely as a stone in the love path of these two young lives, which in the long run would do more good than harm. But now I'm not so sure; I had a long talk with Doctor Mornington last night. I'm afraid Mrs. Barrington is very seriously ill, and from what he told me I gather that her son's future is preying on her mind. She is really anxious at last to see him married. Colonel Barrington is going to have a serious talk with Cleeve on the subject, and for all I know may have already had it. That would account for Cleeve's indifference to Yvonne; for if he thought a marriage with Muriel Ryder would prolong his mother's life by one minute, he would marry her regardless of the consequences."

"I don't see why that should upset you; you expected antagonism, it was part of your scheme. We were to put stones in their path," said Helen Courtney disjointedly, seeking to minimise the result of her rather hasty summing

up of the situation, a summing up she now somewhat regretted.

"We were, Helen, but circumstances alter cases. Cleeve may now know his mother's condition; he's probably being driven by the love he bears her and it's just possible he has already made up his mind. If so, Yvonne has come on the scene too late and my dream, Helen, will remain a dream. I've made a mistake, a great mistake; I didn't reckon on events moving so quickly, I thought there'd be at least a few uneventful days before Cleeve brought things to a head. After my talk with Doctor Mornington I realised I had not as many hours, and now after what you've told me I feel my stones have raised a formidable barrier between Cleeve and Yvonne."

"Nonsense! Eloise, you're taking the events of last night too seriously."

"I'm afraid you won't say that when you hear me out. Do you know I hinted to Yvonne that Cleeve had a past?"

"You *what?*"

"Yes I did, I hinted at some scandal and all that sort of thing."

"Whatever for? My dear Eloise, I really can't believe you!"

"Well, Helen, I did it, I wanted to make Yvonne interested in Cleeve before he advanced too far with Muriel. You know nothing more disgusts a young girl full of animal spirits, as Yvonne is, than a goody-goody young man, and I was sure that within a week she would find out that the big stone of scandal I deliberately placed in their path was a very inoffensive pebble. I gathered from a chat I had with Yvonne, as I've already told you, that Cleeve was on the point of proposing to Muriel when Yvonne came on the scene, and viewing the case as desperate, I thought a little antagonism between Cleeve and Yvonne would quickly ripen the attraction of five years ago into something else. A *real* love, Helen, for if I'm certain of anything on this earth it is that those two are on the brink of a really true and great love. You may say what you like, but in normal circumstances the more obstacles placed in the path of such a love the more they test what should be tested. If time and Cleeve's recklessness were not against

me I'm sure my plan would have succeeded, and last night I was happy in the knowledge that the more Yvonne repelled him the more Cleeve threw discretion to the winds. About eleven o'clock when she refused to go in to supper with him on the grounds that 'Reggie Cuthbertson might ask her,' he went straight to Jenkins and asked if there were any spare rooms. Jenkins told him he would enquire, and Cleeve said: 'Don't trouble, but send Griffiths home.' I overheard this and, jumping to the conclusion that Cleeve intended to stay the night, I at once told my maid to give instructions to have the room opposite Colonel St. Ledger's made ready.

"Then, my dear Helen, when all the guests had gone Cleeve Barrington turned up just as Yvonne and I were having a quiet chat before retiring. He told me he couldn't get his 'blessed car to start.' I pretended surprise, and told the footman to order my car round at once. My dear, you should have seen his face!" Mrs. de Haviland chuckled at the recollection. "It was instantly clouded with disappointment, but only momentarily. Apparently without an effort he banished the cloud and began talking to Yvonne as though the prospect of being taken home, after all, was the greatest relief in the world. I was very amused and waited expectantly to see how he would take Jenkins' announcement that my chauffeur had also gone home and that Mr. Barrington's car was not in the garage.

"Cleeve was thoroughly on his guard, not a flicker of an eyelid, just a few sentences in a bored, apologetic tone,— 'No wonder he couldn't get his car to start if it wasn't there; he was awfully sorry for the trouble he was giving, but he could sleep on the sofa or the billiard table, or anywhere.' I pretended to fall in with this arrangement, we bade him good-night and I took Yvonne off to bed and heard her lock her door. Then I went downstairs and met Cleeve going towards the billiard room looking full of thought. My dear Helen, I don't know what possessed me, I suppose it was the desire not to let Cleeve know I'd made any preparations for his stay. I told him I'd taken Yvonne to my room and he could occupy hers. Another complication! For the same reason I had not told my maid earlier in the evening that Cleeve was likely to occupy the room, and she

thinking it was for Miss Ryder, who stayed here the last time we had a dance, put out one of my nightdresses on the bed, and what do you think? I'm told Cleeve has just gone and the nightdress is missing!"

"But, surely," said Mrs. Courtney in a somewhat shocked voice, "you don't think Cleeve has run off with your nightdress?"

"That is exactly what I do think. I thought its disappearance was a good sign, but after what you tell me I can only conclude he wore it and has taken it away to have it washed and returned. There was a rather unpleasant scuffle last night. I was awakened by the sound of loud talking; I slipped on my dressing gown and had almost reached the end of the corridor when I realised that an altercation was taking place between Cleeve and Colonel St. Ledger. I was about to ask what was the matter when I heard Cleeve say: 'You blackguard!' and Colonel St. Ledger retort: 'Blackguard or not, kissing goes by favour, my friend. I take all I can get in this life.' I think from the tone of his voice he was not quite sober. Cleeve replied: 'Then here's something else for you to take!' and if you had heard him speak you would have realised the temper he was in. There was a sound of scuffling, and a little later Colonel St. Ledger was shot out into the passage. I didn't know what to do, I stood still for a few minutes, and then as things quieted down I returned to my room."

"I suppose you thought that Cleeve's attraction for Yvonne had something to do with his wanting to stay the night, and connected Cleeve's treatment of Colonel St. Ledger as acts in defence of her?"

"Yes, Helen, I thought it was because he wanted to be near Yvonne, and see a little more of her in the morning, but if he didn't dance with her it can't be, can it? As for the row with Colonel St. Ledger, well, you know what he is, and I thought he might have said something to Yvonne which Cleeve resented."

Helen Courtney reflected. A little while ago, overcome by her friend's distress, she had sought to belittle the conclusions which had forced themselves on her (Mrs. Courtney's) mind; now in the light of what Mrs. de Haviland

had said, she saw the futility of her effort. Her remark that "There was no love lost between those two" had only brought to a head conclusions which sooner or later Eloise would have drawn. She had all the material for arriving at them, only her hope, her dream had clouded the issue. To attempt to buoy up that hope, that dream, would be mistaken kindness; as Eloise had said, time was against her, and now facts had to be faced.

"Well, Eloise, I don't think Yvonne had anything to do with it. Colonel St. Ledger was very rude to Muriel Ryder last night."

"Rude to Muriel Ryder! What makes you think that?"

"I can't give you any details, but I overheard a few words which passed between Reggie Cuthbertson and Cleeve, and I fancy I heard Muriel Ryder's name mentioned. I caught a glimpse of Cleeve's face at the time and I think it gave even Reggie a fright. I didn't hear very much, but I heard Cleeve say something about setting a trap and giving the Colonel a 'damn good hiding for speaking to any girl like that.' "

Mrs. de Haviland was too agitated to speculate upon Colonel St. Ledger's misdeeds. Her brain was reeling as she grasped the sole fact that mattered.

"Oh, Helen, I see my mistake now. I should have taken Cleeve into my confidence from the first, but I couldn't. Believe me, Helen, I couldn't! Both Cleeve and Muriel hinted to me last night that they'd heard Yvonne was married, and instead of politely telling Muriel to mind her own business and Cleeve the truth, I fenced with them and changed the conversation as soon as I could manage it. Now when Cleeve finds out I haven't been open with him he'll put it all down to Yvonne. I've made one mistake after another. I wanted the attraction to come first and the explanation afterwards, but all I've done is to drive the attraction away. I see it all now. I see on what a treacherous foundation I have erected my castle of hope. I never reckoned on their not dancing together, I never reckoned on the sudden aggravation of Mrs. Barrington's illness, or on Colonel St. Ledger putting Muriel Ryder in a position to make a claim on Cleeve's chivalry. Everything seems against me, Helen. The very

antagonism between them on which I relied so much has been fatal to my dream.”

These despairing utterances were in themselves eloquent of Mrs. de Haviland's agitation, but more evidence was forthcoming of the stunning blow she had received. She rose from the bed and, feeling her way blindly towards her dressing room, opened the door and passed through.

CHAPTER X

DAWN broke; the hands of the clock moved slowly round; the figure on the bed lay inanimate. Her healthy, regular breathing and the ticking of the clock were the only sounds to be heard. Slowly the clock hands moved, a little click broke the monotony in the room and all was silent again, save for the ticking and the breathing. Followed a slight hum faintly resembling a bee on the wing and then, in low dulcet tones, the clock struck eight. . . . Monotony still claimed the room . . . monotony and peace. The drawn blinds resisted the day, but the sun, as though determined to defeat the efforts of man, searched those windows for the weak joints in their armour, found them as it rose above the trees and sent dazzling beams slantwise across the room. . . . Still the sleeper slept.

“Go away! go away!” ticked the clock, but the angry sun would have none of it. It penetrated little pin points in the blinds and, finding these of no avail, called its sister to its aid. But the breeze responded lazily; it bellied the blinds just once and ceased its efforts as if it, too, were not awake; it shook the leaves just once and then, as though it had turned over it went to sleep again. An hour sped. Come! . . . Come! . . . Nine times the clock repeated it. The sleeper turned, and watched abstractedly the motes floating in and out of the sunbeams. Her hands were clasped behind her head and one sleeve of her night-dress slipped back, revealing her white sloping shoulder. She rubbed her eyes again, stretched herself, and, as her bosom rose, the outline of her figure showed clearly through the shell pink crepe de chine.

She turned towards the clock but sleep still filled her eyes. The hands had disappeared; the clock was nothing but an outline. She rubbed her eyes once more, this time vigorously. The sun swore, and, as if in response to her

acts or frightened by the anger of the sun, the breeze awoke, really awoke! The leaves trembled violently, rustled, remained perfectly still and then fluttered again as the wind burst into a gust, blowing in the blinds with such force that the curtains fell back defeated. In the flood of light which followed the clock found its hands.

"Five minutes past nine. Good! I'll just turn over; I've plenty of time yet."

"No time! . . . No time! . . ." ticked that clock.

For a few seconds the sleeper lay as she had turned. What was the clock saying? . . . No time! No time! She turned again, rubbed her eyes resolutely and was awake. What peace! . . . What peace! . . . Was the clock mocking her? Where was the peace? There was no peace, she knew it; there was only peace in sleep.

The awakening brought it all back, all the happenings of the previous night. The great unhappiness of it all. She had been determined to teach Cleeve Barrington a lesson, but she had taught herself one as the result of meeting a will stronger than her own, and as the recollection of her failure struck her senses a cloud of despair overwhelmed her, and a look crept into her eyes which had not been there yesterday. A look of wonder and disbelief.

"Men are a problem," she murmured with a sigh, and then catching a glimpse of the clock she added: "They only made you, to remind us that any time is kissing time." "Go on! . . . Go on! . . ." the clock replied teasingly. "Go on! Go on! you say? . . . Yes, I will go on, I'll just tell you what they are, I'll tell you everything. They're regular savages, born hunters from the day they open their eyes, and in affairs of the heart, wanton, unprincipled spoilers. I'm sure they only hunt and shoot to keep their savage instincts alive. Their real prey is woman, and judging by the way they behave, I don't know how they ever agree to the marriage laws; how in their omnipotence they ever allow those laws to operate. Lordly things who could, untrammelled by social restrictions, go on picking and choosing as long as their hunting instincts last—that is, when they possess the attractions of their primitive manhood, clean cut athletic bodies, ruthless savage determination and . . . gentle caressing ways when their love and

chivalry are stirred. But I'm sure this sort of man doesn't want to go on picking and choosing, that is, he wouldn't if one could just creep into his heart and turn everything in it upside down. But of course one would have to do it thoroughly. It would have to be such an upset that he'd have his work cut out for the rest of his days straightening things out again. Of course, all men aren't like this, you wise old clock! Some are half women and spend their time grouching because the other kind gets the plums. These, when they are married, seem to regard the outer walls of their dwellings as the confines of the world and gradually drift into a life of bored domesticity. I suppose their perverted hunting instincts are satisfied by ruling as bullies in their little domains and crushing out all romance until nothing is left but the bullying. Or else the limits of their world are prescribed for them by dominant helpmates, and then they themselves are crushed and bullied, and I suppose find some sport (when opportunity occurs) in trapping under cover of darkness. I think Colonel St. Ledger must be one of the latter. I wonder if he has any real sporting instincts at all? Last night at dinner he questioned me about the location of my room and his face reminded me of a snail that pokes its head out when there's no danger, or a pekingese which only barks when the other dog is tied up. Mr. Barrington was sitting opposite and I saw his face getting blacker and blacker. I don't know what possessed me; I wanted to go round and whisper in his ear that I hated the little beast, and then something in his eyes made me furious, a sort of look of distrust. So when Colonel St. Ledger squeezed my hand under the table I forced myself to smile sweetly, otherwise I would have been tempted to pick up a fork and jab him!

"Mr. Barrington was talking to Muriel Ryder at the time, pretending to be most 'empresé;' it must be pretence, because he can't have a 'grande passion' for two girls in the same afternoon, but he stopped speaking suddenly and his mouth closed like a spring trap.

"Then after glaring at Colonel St. Ledger he gave me a look which I'm sure he thought would frighten me, but it didn't, it only made me want to touch his eyelashes! Besides, Mr. Barrington has nothing to do with me and it's no

business of his to try and limit my amusements. So I just looked at him with a frank smile and then turned to Colonel St. Ledger and said in a voice loud enough for Mr. Barrington to overhear: 'Why do you want to know where my room is?' I'm sure Colonel St. Ledger is a pekingese, for I could hardly hear what he said in reply. I think it was something about married men being so discreet in 'affaires du cœur.' The end I didn't quite catch, at any rate I didn't understand its meaning. I thought Mr. Barrington heard it though, so just for fun I told the snail that my room was opposite his and I looked quite 'radieuse' when he told me that if I would leave my door unlocked he'd come and 'hear my prayers.' I think Muriel Ryder must have been asking Mr. Barrington a question, but there was no need for him to answer the way he did. I wonder if he's in the habit of forgetting his manners, for I heard him say 'I'm damned if I know,' and he said it so rudely that the Ryder girl blushed. I told Colonel St. Ledger that I thought someone was paying a great deal too much attention to our conversation, but I don't think he heard me, for he repeated his remark about my door. Then I told him I always locked it, and he said I was wasting opportunities and that affairs of the heart were much more thrilling when one was young. What that has to do with doors beats me!—that the war had altered everything, and everyone 'went to the devil these days,' and that there was no chance of seeing naughty ghosts with the door shut.

"I told him I didn't believe in ghosts of any kind, but that if there were a chance of seeing them I'd leave my door wide open every night and put a chair against it to keep it ajar. I happened to look across the table as I spoke and caught Mr. Barrington staring at me in astonishment, so I just thought I'd teach him a lesson for eavesdropping and, giving Colonel St. Ledger another adoring look, I said: 'I suppose you soldiers take all sorts of risks?'

"'Yes, Yvonne,' he replied, 'we carry our lives in our hands and wear our hearts on our sleeves.'

"I hated the little pig for calling me Yvonne and for the leer which accompanied his silly words, but he's too con-

temptible to be snubbed, so I didn't snub him, I just smiled instead.

"Mr. Barrington immediately had a choking fit and brought his glass down with such force on the table that it broke and cut his finger. Oh, how I hate him for holding women so cheap! If he's in love with that Ryder girl why take any interest in what Colonel St. Ledger says to me? I'm a little beast I know, for it's nothing to do with me, only I hate men who can pretend. Colonel St. Ledger offered his handkerchief to bind the cut but Mr. Barrington just ignored him. Presently I had a little choking sensation in my throat, I could see it was a deep cut, for after a few minutes his handkerchief was quite red; I think he must have seen I was a little upset.

"Before the glass broke, judging by the way he was looking at me, I was sure he hated me as much as I hate him, but when I told him as I glanced at his hand that I was sure Aunt Eloise would excuse him, he looked down at his handkerchief and put his hand under the table, and later on, when no one was noticing, he slipped away and gave me a rather sad look and smiled. He does look nice when he smiles; I think that must be why I agreed to forget, that and Reggie's silly behaviour! Men can be nice when they like, but, had I known that Mr. Barrington only asked me to 'forget' because he had no one else to dance with, I'd rather have put up with Colonel St. Ledger's silly talk. Fancy any man thanking a girl the way he did! Cool wasn't the word for it! . . . When we'd had such a heavenly dance together. I'm sorry I gave in so easily, but never mind, I'll make him regret it yet!"

She sat up in bed, her brow puckered in a thoughtful frown. Then, as her mind worked, a brilliant idea suddenly occurred to her and her eyes sparkled with anticipation. . . . She would dress quickly and go into the rose garden and pluck roses right under his window! . . .

The clock smiled as it ticked, and just as she was leaving the room it chuckled . . . ten times it chuckled!

CHAPTER XI

MEANWHILE on that morning after the dance, before Yvonne was so busy with her thoughts, and prior to Mrs. de Haviland's conversation with Helen Courtney which ended with such great distress, Cleeve Barrington awakened at his usual early hour.

"I suppose William will come along with my clothes," he murmured sleepily to himself. "If he doesn't I'll have to walk home in my evening clothes or Yvonne's nightdress," at which latter thought he suddenly became wide awake and an expression difficult to define stole over his face. Yvonne's nightdress! Momentarily his mind was on that, his eyes showed it, but his mouth remained firm, the compression of his lips did not relax. "Fancy that despicable old *dépravé*"—he was now thinking of Colonel St. Ledger—"behaving like a Bond Street cad! I was a 'bewitching little devil' was I? Perhaps I was until his lips came in contact with my stubbly cheek! I hope he'll carry a black eye for a day or two! I'm sure I landed *one*. It's those old beasts who by their acts and insinuations make flappers the precocious things they are, while at the same time they talk airily about their knowledge of the world as though that phrase hides their muddy, sordid thoughts, their flabby, wrinkled cheeks, their evil, smiling mouths, quite unconscious that every decent minded man and woman holds them in nothing but contempt for their ridiculous efforts to persuade the immature that the virility of their manners and conversation is a perpetual antidote to senile decay! Hell take the brutes!

"I wish to God Yvonne *had* been here; it would have taught her better than to encourage unhealthy conversations with wrinkled dirt. Unless she . . . But that's impossible," he ejaculated aloud. "Quite impossible!

Any rate, I'm not going to believe she saw what the beast was driving at."

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in."

"Good morning, Mr. Cleeve."

He was still "Mr. Cleeve" and not "sir" to his servant, William Barker. Though eight years older than Cleeve, there was more than an element of companionship between the two. William had played no small part in Cleeve Barrington's early outdoor life. They had ridden and played together. As a boy, it had been Cleeve's ambition to knock the ball over the pavilion as William sometimes did in cricket, when he got the chance. As a youth he admired William's stable vocabulary; as a youth he set himself to outvie William's fearless riding and even when Cleeve surpassed William's tuition, the former lost none of his respect for the hero of his youth who had done so much to develop his healthy manhood. While William, on his part, gained in the pride of successful tutorship what little he lost in prestige.

"You're up early, William; how did you know I was here?"

William put down the valise he was carrying before replying. "Well, Mr. Cleeve, Griffiths came round last night and said you had sent him home, so he thought I'd better bring round a change for you."

"Anything else?" asked Cleeve, who noticed an amused smile on William's face as he proceeded to lay out the clothes he had brought.

"No, Mr. Cleeve, I've no other news."

"News! Who's talking about news? You know what I meant. . . . I'd like to hear how Griffiths put it."

William kept his head down, ostensibly in an effort to attach a collar to the back of a shirt.

"Well, he did say he wondered what the game was *this* time."

"And what did you say?"

"Oh, I said nothing; you see, Mr. Cleeve, I didn't know you were sleeping in a lady's nightdress."

Cleeve burst out laughing; he had momentarily forgotten about the nightdress.

"I suppose if Griffiths had known he'd have said something?"

"Well, we are rather friendly, as you know, Mr. Cleeve."

Cleeve was well aware of the friendship between William and Griffiths, he knew they often discussed his affairs and was so tolerant of it that William seldom failed to satisfy his master's curiosity.

"I suppose if you had known you and Griffiths would have had a fine old laugh about it. Well, you can pack it up and . . ." Cleeve hesitated, for the first time he noticed it was torn across the chest.

"Yes, Mr. Cleeve, I'll get it washed and repaired and see it's sent back."

"Oh, no, William, we'll keep it, just as it is. Kind of trophy, you see."

* * * * *

An hour later Cleeve Barrington, his breakfast finished, his servant gone, was walking idly along the well-mown grass path, past the lily pond and the rock garden in the direction of the sundial in front of a clump of firs on a little rising knoll, where there was a garden seat.

He had left Swanston House intending to go home, but that seat attracted him. He liked that knoll with the well wooded slopes and the miniature valleys with their meadows beneath, and the early morning sun shining on the lake in the distance seemed to invite him to bask in its warmth and revel in the beauty of the surrounding scene.

Seating himself, he filled his pipe. What a beautiful world it was, the freshness of the morning seemed to call youth to action and to offer peace to old age. He was in a lazy mood after the excitement of the night before, a dreaming mood, and he allowed himself to dream. . . . Time slipped by, he knew not how fast, but presently, as it appeared to him, down the path he had traversed he saw a slim graceful girl with chestnut hair and violet eyes, attired in an old-fashioned evening dress of five years ago. The faint notes of a band which had almost passed out of recollection were borne to his ears, and that figure stood still where he had first seen it as though wondering from whence the music came. The familiarity of the opening bars seemed to give the day-dream a reality it did not

possess. He seemed to leave himself, smoking that pipe, to the contentment of the surroundings, while a part of him, a younger part, sped with the fleetness of the wind to the little spot on that pathway which was holy.

“Go on, Cleeve! Go on! They’re overtaking you!” he cried to that other part of him, the other self, for it was a race. From all sides other men joined in, young and old, the tails of their coats flying in the wind, all rushing to that spot. He saw that other self turn as the approaching, rapid footfalls, ever drawing nearer and nearer, fell upon his ears; he, the other self, was losing his lead, falling behind just when the violet eyes were turned in his direction with mute appeal.

“Go on, you fool!” he shouted to that other self, and the words were hardly out of his mouth when the music took shape. It was “Destiny!” They were crowding round her! they were clamouring for a dance! and she, that girlish figure, put one arm to her face as if to blot out her fears, and waved the other blindly with an appealing gesture. In one bound that other self was at her side, he pushed the crowd aside, too out of breath to speak; he just clasped her in his arms. Thank God he had won! Then the crowd melted away, they were alone, she and he; down the path they tripped to the rhythm of the music, circling and circling, drawing closer at every step. Lost to the world in his reverie, the pipe slipped from his fingers; that other self was looking with rapture at his prize, the violet eyes were the same, the chestnut hair the same, only the figure was a little fuller, more alluring. “Oh, Yvonne, why don’t you come to me!”

The pipe fell on the crazy-stone pavement and gave him a start. He rubbed his eyes, was he still dreaming? Did that white knitted frock, clinging so lovingly to a bosom which still proclaimed its youth, really clothe the idol of his day-dream? He was back to earth again, and pulling out his watch, he saw it was ten o’clock.

He rose at once and with swinging elastic strides retraced his steps, hurrying to the rose garden on to which the windows of the room he had occupied opened out. It was no trick of his imagination; some one was in the rose

garden, the dainty trim figure he had seen was that of Yvonne and she now stood with her back partly turned towards him, studying a rose she had just plucked. As he watched her she stooped and, plucking a tiny daisy, laid the rose at her feet. With a feeling of envy he watched her raise the small flower to her lips and kiss it. Watched, with an ironical twist of his lips, while she pulled the petals one by one and let them flutter to the ground. How typical her actions were; the red rose proclaiming its love lay unheeded at her feet, while a common daisy attracted her. She had kissed it as if anxious to create *its* love and no sooner had it nestled against her lips, so thankful for her favours, than she was pulling it to pieces. Just as she favoured men and then stabbed them in the heart, only he would not mind her plucking him if he were a flower if she would only give him one kiss of her own free will like that.

Her acts recalled the biblical story of Samson and Delilah, and he could not suppress the thought that if Delilah were anything like Yvonne, Samson was more entitled to envy than deserving of pity.

For some time he remained hidden, peeping round the yew hedge which sheltered the rose garden, until the last petal had been plucked and he saw with fascinated eyes that she carelessly threw away the bare stem with its stripped golden button. He supposed most women were like that—lavished favours on those who momentarily appealed to them and, when they had winged and wounded, threw them aside with the heartless feeling that wantons have for those who have ceased to interest. Then he found himself comparing Yvonne with Muriel. Muriel was the sort of girl who would cherish love to eternity, but he had an unvoiced feeling that he would rather have one kiss given in a moment's love from Yvonne than all the kisses of a lifetime from Muriel or anyone else.

Suddenly with a feeling of jealous anger he recalled the scene he had witnessed the previous night. Well, if she could give a kiss to a backboneless being like Reggie Cuthbertson he would make her give him one.

He watched her stoop to pick up the rose and as she

held it to her face, to breathe in its perfume, he turned the corner and walked up to her.

"Hello, Miss Yvonne!" he called carelessly.

Yvonne slowly faced him and then, very sweetly and with a little innocent smile, replied: "Why, good morning, Mr. Barrington."

"Why, what's this, Miss Yvonne?" said Cleeve with mock severity. "Who's been pulling a daisy to pieces?"

"I have," Yvonne admitted demurely, but her eyes were veiled by their long lashes. "I've been playing 'He loves me, he loves me not!'"

"Oh, and what happened?" He looked fiercely at her, making no attempt to hide the chagrin he felt.

"Why he loves me very, *very* much. In fact, Mr. Barrington"—and here she raised her eyes to his—"I think I might say he would die for me."

"And does the *jawly young bean* wag his tail? For that's all he's fit for, I should say," he exclaimed savagely.

Yvonne did not reply; she looked up at him with a simulated air of reproach and he, disconcerted by the unexpectedness of her softened expression, unconsciously drew nearer.

"Are you very fond of him?"

She assumed a puzzled frown and walked slowly towards a seat at the further end of the garden hidden behind some laurel bushes. Cleeve followed and stood in front of her as she sat down.

"Are you very fond of him?" he persisted.

"Won't you sit down?" She gave the invitation in a soft, caressing voice, and laying her hand on his arm replied hesitatingly: "I—don't—know. You've no idea how much I've thought about it, Mr. Barrington, but I really can't understand my feelings."

"Then you don't love him," he decided emphatically. "You couldn't help understanding your feelings if you did."

Yvonne looked up at him with admiration in her eyes.

"What a lot of experience you must have had, Mr. Barrington, I envy you!"

She continued to stare at him relentlessly, while a flood

of colour rushed to his cheeks and mounted until it vanished in the thick hair above his forehead.

"I should imagine you are not without experience yourself after the exhibition you gave last night!" he retorted.

Yvonne dropped her eyes and moved imperceptibly nearer to him.

"Please forgive me, Mr. Barrington," she murmured softly, "I am very tactless, I know, but can't we talk for a little while without quarrelling?"

As she finished speaking she looked up at him appealingly.

A puzzled expression gathered in his eyes. Could this be the girl he had known yesterday? Where had her tantalising, fury-rousing manner gone? And what accounted for the soft warm glow which seemed to surround her?

A sudden encouragement born of hope in his heart impelled him to change his mood to suit hers.

"You *know* I don't want to quarrel with you, Yvonne! You are not tactless, it is I who always put my clumsy foot in it!"

He bent impulsively forward as he spoke, intending to take her hand in his, and then suddenly drew her into his arms. The hope in his heart turned to certainty as she nestled closer and hid her head on his shoulder. His pulses leapt and a torrent of endearing words burst from his lips as he kissed her hair and buried his head in the mass of perfumed waves.

"Yvonne, darling, look at me!" he whispered. "My dear, tell me it is true—you *do* love me?"

Yvonne did not answer but clutched the lapel of his coat as if in silent protest at the suddenness of it all.

"You're not afraid of me, Yvonne? I only want to look at you, to look deep into your eyes and read there what your lips will not tell me."

He felt her quiver in response to his appeal; then she slowly raised her face and, still keeping her eyes veiled, offered her lips for his kiss.

For a moment he hesitated, unable to believe, unable to trust his senses. This girl whose vision had haunted him all those years was his at last. Her face was white, her eyes closed, her bosom heaved, her soft red lips were slightly

parted. There was no mistaking their invitation, and with a wild exultant wave which overpowered him he bent over her, crushed those lips beneath his with savage instinct, and then, as though he understood at last, his passion died, his pressure relaxed. They were too soft and warm to crush, they cried for something more than passion; and tenderly, lingeringly he kissed again with kisses which won their way to her heart. He felt her thrill to his unspoken thoughts. The tide of victory drowned his senses.

"My God, Yvonne, have I won? No one shall take you from me now." And as she moved protestingly he allowed her to slip from his embrace. After those kisses he felt there could be no more misunderstandings, and in the exultation of the moment he rejoiced that without a word from her they had plighted their troth.

She stood up like one dazed, struggling with her feelings; to her it was the real thing, it had come at last. Oh, but the horror of it, it had come soiled and unclean from one who had made a study of women's weaknesses. What a poor, purblind little fool she had been to think she could match her forces against a professor of love! Where had her resolution gone? Oh, how could she tell Aunt Eloise . . . for she could not stay at Swanston House after this . . . tell Aunt Eloise, whose constant hints were warning her? The thought was impossible. "My dear Yvonne," she would say, "how could you lower yourself like that?" No, Aunt Eloise would not talk so crudely, she would be sweet and gentle as she always was, but *direct*, oh, so direct. . . . "My child, my dear Yvonne, it would be mistaken kindness on my part to pretend I am anything but disappointed, bitterly disappointed" . . . She looked up, intending to tell this man she was no match for his mercurial personality and the subtlety of his designs, and had she told him in her then subdued mood they would have understood each other, but unfortunately he betrayed only too plainly his feeling of triumph, and that look was enough. She misread it for the look he had given her when they first kissed, misread it for the gloating of the strong over the weak, and in that instant her weakness vanished.

In an effort to collect her thoughts she walked away from

him and then, finding he followed her, turned and faced him.

Still with that look of triumph on his face he stretched out his hand to take hers and an understanding smile softened his expression as she withdrew, a smile which slowly vanished as he saw the pain in her eyes.

“What have I done, Yvonne? Have I frightened you?”

She did not answer him, but continued to regard him with those baffling eyes.

“Yvonne, answer me! I haven’t offended you? I only loved you, dear, with a love I have never felt before.”

Then she answered and Cleeve Barrington stood as though turned to stone.

“I don’t want your love . . . if it is love!”

His face turned deadly white, he shook as if someone had dealt him a blow, then slowly he said in a dull voice: “You told me you loved me, Yvonne.”

“I did not! It was you in your conceit who imagined that! Do you think I could love an overgrown stable boy? . . . For that is all you are! Your head has been turned by the worship of country girls with whom you come in contact. I allowed you to kiss me just for the satisfaction of hearing a love confession from you, a confession which apparently flows so often and so glibly from your lips! I used all my attractions to deceive as *you* deceive, and to humiliate as *you* humiliate. Now please go; go to your country maidens and tell them that Mrs. du Barry treats as an insult what *they* would consider a favour. And tell them also that even if I were free”—and here she raised her hands and tauntingly twisted her wedding ring before his eyes—“and you were the last man on earth I’d go to the other end of the world rather than let your shadow cross my path!”

“You . . . are . . . married? Then Colonel St. Ledger was right when he said . . .”

“Colonel St. Ledger is always right.”

Cleeve made a threatening movement towards her but checked it with an effort. “Then why did you return my kisses?” he demanded in a voice from which all expression had vanished, leaving it hard and cold.

Her resentment rose at his commanding tone and, drop-

ping a mock curtsy, she replied: "For my own personal advantage, O Lord of the Stables!"

His reaction was almost as instantaneous and complete as hers. What right had a married woman to act like this? There was a withering, cynical intonation in his voice when he next spoke.

"For your own personal advantage, Mrs. du Barry?" His nostrils dilated and his lips curled. "And do you know what we call married women who use their attractions for their own personal advantage?"

For a second she hesitated, but meeting the challenge in his eyes, said defiantly: "No, I really don't know what you call them, Mr. Barrington . . . not in the stables!"

"In the stables? . . . Well . . . we call them *harlots*, Mrs. du Barry, nothing more and nothing less!"

She gave a little cry and he stood watching the flush of shame creep over her face until she covered it with her hands in an endeavour to blot out from her vision the terrible look of contempt in his eyes, a look which also expressed in no small degree pity for a woman who could stoop so low.

CHAPTER XII

An extract from Yvonne's journal

Swanston House.

A WOMAN should always be mistress of herself, but it's very difficult, my dear journal. How anyone could help loving a man like Cleeve—yes! I'm going to call him Cleeve here—I don't know, but you see there are two parts of me, the part that hates Mr. Barrington and the part that loves Cleeve. I know what it is in me that loves him, it is the beauty-loving part. He is such a nice shape; even the back of his head looks different from other men's, and when he smiles it is such a crinkly, friendly smile that you could never believe his hobby is proposing to girls, or that there's a skeleton somewhere waiting to rear its head! But it is the hating part of me which makes me write like this, and I want the other part to write! The part that wants to be held in his arms.

A few pages back, dear journal, I told you I'd make him want to kiss me again, and I said he never should; and you believed me, didn't you? . . . The head was willing but the heart was weak; it was just heaven to lie in his arms! He didn't hurt me like he did the other time—that is, my feelings—and if I didn't know his real character I should have thought he really loved me. I wonder if he felt me stroke his hair? . . . I don't think so; I did it ever so gently, yet I did want to ruffle it so. I suppose there must be something not quite respectable about me; I do like being kissed and I'm not ashamed to tell you. I don't think any woman would want another man's kisses after his, unless she knew the truth—that he hands them round like buns at a tea fight! I suppose that silly little Muriel—no! I musn't scratch, you don't approve. I suppose

Muriel gets kissed the same way, and I suspect she lies in his arms with her eyes shut and dreams of heaven. She wouldn't keep a little slit open and peep at his face as I did and catch a glimpse of its reality. I don't know how men can act such lies. When he held me in his arms he looked as though he really loved me, only I remembered and knew it was a trick of his; a prompting of the devil which Aunt Eloise says all men have somewhere in their hearts. And yet if I hadn't been told about him and if it hadn't been for that other kiss he gave me I would never have suspected he was only pretending to want my love. And to think that for one little minute I trusted him and almost,—no, *quite* believed in him! That was when I forgot that men are much better actors than women if they want to get their own way . . . It wasn't Aunt Eloise who gave me that priceless tip, but Reggie Cuthbertson after he saw me dancing with Mr. Barrington. The other part of me, the part that wants to scratch, would love Cleeve too, if his character fitted his face; but it doesn't. He looks strong, determined and reckless; he certainly isn't strong, he couldn't propose so freely if he were, but I think he must be reckless, there's no doubting that after what the Hon. Alfred Maynard told me last night . . . Cleeve made his horse take the "Devil's Leap" last winter because the Hon. Alfred dared him to do it. The Master saw him heading for it and shouted: "You can't jump that, Barrington, don't be a damned fool!" But Cleeve turned in his saddle and laughed as he shouted back: "I can with a fall!" and the whole hunt was petrified to see him head straight at the jump, his horse spurred on, striving to do the impossible under his reckless impetuous enthusiasm; to see the horse gather its feet under it and leap high into the air, and the next moment to hear the sickening thud as horse and rider fell heavily the other side. Then followed the cheers which broke out when Cleeve picked himself up and remounted as if it had been an everyday occurrence. . . . *That* shows you the kind of man he is! Why, a woman would go to the devil—I like using that word, dear journal, when I tell you things!—for a man like that. I would myself, only . . . I know there'd be a bevy of us following him in the same direction! . . . But, after all,

I think I'd rather be in such a man's harem than the one and only wife of any other man than Cleeve. . . . But I hate him! . . . Not because he called me that horrid name—I like him for doing that—I can't say why . . . I suppose it's because he spoke his real feelings then and I wasn't honest enough to speak mine. . . . Only I won't tempt him to ask for another kiss. There's no sport in it when his mouth twitches and his eyes seem to search the back of your head with reproach. It makes me want to take his hand, makes me want to take him where there are no other women, for women aren't to be trusted either, that is *most* of them aren't. I only hope the woman who set him on the wrong path will get her deserts . . . nothing less than six hundred and seventy-eight degrees fahrenheit, I hope!

I'm not so sure of myself now somehow; I'm just a little bit afraid that if he made love to me again I might do something foolish. I really *wanted* those kisses . . . that's why I put my face close to his . . . and the next time I might want them more and he might know, and then . . . Well . . . there might be another skeleton waiting to raise its head. I wonder what he would say if he read this? . . . It's not really me. I've never felt like this before; I don't think I'll ever respect myself again.

* * * * *

I'm waiting for a telegram in reply to mine. My prison! . . . I'm going back to it; it will upset Aunt Eloise, but she won't know that I wired for the telegram to be sent. I must stop now, journal, I can hear someone coming along the corridor. . . . It's the telegram, I know. . . . And now I'm happy, yes, I *am* happy. . . . No, I'm *not*! I want to cry, and that's the *truth*!

CHAPTER XIII

“**E**LTON, have you seen Mrs. Barrington?”

“No, sir, she’s upstairs resting and doesn’t want to be disturbed.”

“Oh, just tired, I suppose?”

There was no reply.

“Now, Elton, what’s this?”

“Well, sir, I’m not really supposed to know, and er . . . er . . .”

“Er . . . er?” queried Cleeve Barrington. “What’s the matter?”

“I promised not to say, sir.”

Cleeve Barrington could hardly believe his ears, and as for Elton, he stood facing him mutely with troubled eyes.

“Good God! Elton, has anything happened?”

Elton remained mute, and Cleeve Barrington, noticing with feelings of apprehension that the old man was struggling to restrain his emotion, put his hand on his shoulder.

“You’re all right, Elton, aren’t you?”

“Mr. Cleeve, I can’t do my duty no longer.”

“Elton, there’s no need for you to say such a thing in any case, we’re all too fond of you. And as for duty, no one could do it better. I’m not going to listen if you’re going to talk like that! You do a better day’s work than I do or ever will.”

The old man’s eyes expressed gratitude, but the trouble in them remained.

“Mr. Cleeve, sir, I know. I know what you are, not only to me, but to all of us. You think us just perfect when we’re not, but duty’s duty, and you don’t quite understand, sir.”

A look of perplexity furrowed Cleeve Barrington’s brow.

“Elton, you beat me this time. What *are* you driving at?”

“Well, Mr. Cleeve, I’ve been told not to tell you things, but I can’t keep secrets any longer. And you’ll be doing me a great favour if you’ll tell Colonel Barrington that loyalty to milady is disloyalty to one she likes better than herself, and it can’t be done no longer, Mr. Cleeve.”

It was not so much Elton’s words as the emotion he was so obviously struggling to suppress which brought to Cleeve Barrington’s mind the conversation he had had with his mother and father the other day. Turning on his heel he passed through the hall, down the terrace steps and across the well-kept lawns; the majestic cedar trees casting their long shadows unheeded in his path. The gorgeous effect of the afternoon sun, as it lit up the leaves of the copper beeches, was unnoticed as with head bent Cleeve strove to swallow that ever present lump in his throat and steadfastly walked on. Walked on past the line of beeches which marked the boundary of the spacious lawns of Longton Hall and then vaulting over the iron fence he found himself in the paddock.

So that was it, was it? His mother and father were keeping something from him, sheltering him as they always had done. If Elton’s words meant anything they meant that his mother was very much more seriously ill than he had imagined. Else why should Elton have talked to him like that? He was always being told that Mrs. Barrington was tired and did not want to be disturbed. What was the matter? Was it something more than old age? One thing was obvious, they were all striving to spare him, his mother, his father. Even the servants had been told not to say anything. Now he must know the truth, know the worst, he told himself, and if it would make his mother happy to see him married, why he would marry Muriel, or Alice, or anyone else she wished. “Oh, God,” he murmured, “do they all think mother’s happiness is nothing to me that the truth should be hidden?” Well, he must have the truth, but who would give it to him? . . . Elton? He didn’t know; at any rate, not the whole truth. . . . His father? He would neither deny nor affirm. . . . His mother? No! She would be the last person in the

world. There was only one person who could tell all. . . . The doctor, if he could be persuaded, but that would be difficult. Mornington, he reflected, could be a regular sphinx when he liked. Well, he would have a try, and then, making up his mind to lose no time, he turned to the left in the direction of the stables. A few minutes later Griffiths was driving the 30 h.p. Minerva, all out, tearing along under Cleeve's exhortations, at a terrific pace in the direction of the doctor's residence.

* * * * *

Cleeve Barrington was not kept waiting for more than a few seconds, for hardly had he been shown into the consulting room when Dr. Mornington hurriedly entered, wearing a puzzled, anxious expression.

"What's the matter, Cleeve? Nothing wrong at the Hall, is there?"

"That's what I want to know; that's why I've come here, Doctor, to find out. Were you there this afternoon?"

"What makes you ask that question?"

"Look here, Doctor, it's no use fencing with me. I know it's unprofessional to talk about your patients, but in this case your patient happens to be my mother. I know quite well she's seriously ill and I want to know the truth."

He looked steadily at Dr. Mornington as he spoke, but the latter's face was sphinx-like in its expression, and Cleeve's heart sank. He was apprehensive that he would get nothing from the doctor.

"Look here, Doctor, I've got to know. Do you think this is a case for standing on professional etiquette?"

Still Dr. Mornington did not reply. He had promised both Colonel and Mrs. Barrington that he would tell nothing, and so the sphinx-like expression remained. He had never doubted Colonel Barrington's wisdom in keeping the knowledge from Cleeve, he argued that there must be some good motive for doing so, and in any case it was one thing to pass a few casual remarks in connection with Mrs. Barrington's illness with a friend of the family like Mrs. de Haviland, but quite another thing to have an open dis-

cussion forced on him by one so vitally interested as Cleeve Barrington was in this case. Dr. Mornington was as honourable as he was skilled and the wishes of his patients he regarded as a sacred trust. So he quietly took a seat, intending to tell Cleeve Barrington that in this case his tongue was tied, but to tell him in such a way that it would give no offence.

“Cleeve, my boy, I hope you won’t be offended at what I’m going to say, but we doctors have no right to discuss our patients without their consent. I have attended every member of your family for thirty years and I have been honoured with their friendship as well as their trust. That trust I can’t betray. . . . Mind you, I’m not admitting or denying that I paid Longton Hall a professional visit this afternoon, but even if I did pay that visit, I think your father is the man to approach.”

“My father?” Cleeve gave a hard, desperate laugh. “My father! Have you ever tried to get anything out of him?”

“And because it’s hopeless you come to me? It isn’t quite flattering, Cleeve, is it?” observed Dr. Mornington, pressing his advantage. A little glint of satisfaction crept into the corners of his eyes; he knew what to expect. The impulsiveness in Cleeve’s nature would be aroused, and impulsive men were easy to deal with.

“It depends on how you take matters,” responded Cleeve with a quietness which was disconcerting. “I haven’t come here to demand a confidence, I’ve come to plead. When you came into the room I read your anxiety. I’m always being told that my mother is tired and doesn’t want to be disturbed. She’s tired and doesn’t want to be disturbed again to-day, and Elton, who told me this, couldn’t restrain his feelings. That look of yours brought a lump to my throat. Whether you tell me or not, I have gathered something of the truth. My mother is seriously ill, and I want to ask you a very direct question, I think it’s one you will answer. . . . Is my mother worrying on my account?”

Dr. Mornington’s resolution in the presence of Cleeve’s emotion, for there was a betraying huskiness in the latter’s

voice, was shaken. It was difficult to parry an appeal of the heart. He would hear what Cleeve had to say.

“What makes you think that?”

“Well, Doctor, I’ll come to the point at once. I believe my mother is seriously ill. I know her one ambition is to see me married. I feel she is hiding her illness from me in order that I shall not be influenced by it to do anything in haste, and I’m afraid she thinks that if I knew how ill she was, I might be tempted to rush into a marriage which I would afterwards regret.”

Cleeve watched Dr. Mornington closely as he spoke and a slight movement on the latter’s part told him that his suspicions were correct.

“The fact of the matter is,” he continued, “I haven’t married because I’ve been too romantic. I have been waiting for the passion we all read about in books, and I have come to the conclusion that if I wait for that millennium I shall find my coffin first! And it is time I married, isn’t it?”

Dr. Mornington nodded in agreement. “We all think that, you know, Cleeve.”

“Well, if I thought that it would relieve my mother’s mind I might hurry up my steps a bit. But I do think I should know exactly how ill she is and the nature of the illness. What is the meaning of her constantly retiring to her room and not wanting to be disturbed? She is suffering from attacks of some kind; I’m not exactly devoid of common sense! I think when I’ve learnt that much I should be told what it is. If you won’t tell me, well, I shall find out, and you mustn’t blame me if I go my own way about it. I’m not a child and I’m not going to be treated like one.”

“Well, Cleeve, I don’t blame you. But it’s Colonel Barrington you should speak to.”

Cleeve laughed again, impatiently. “My father is not a free agent in this matter. He is only doing what mother’s persuaded him to do. In a case like this you are the judge of what is right and what is wrong, the sole judge, Doctor.”

Dr. Mornington was visibly wavering. He was turning things over in his mind. Like every capable doctor, he treated the patient as well as the disease, and now he was

busy weighing up the consequences of a refusal to discuss his patient. If he continued in his refusal he might do more harm than good. Cleeve was not the man to take no for an answer where his mother was concerned. To equivocate would only make him more suspicious, more determined to find out the truth. He was apprehensive that Cleeve in his impetuosity might even broach the subject to Mrs. Barrington herself and further disturb her peace of mind, a peace of mind on which so much depended.

"Perhaps," he reflected inwardly, "it would be better to let Cleeve know everything and he could then tell his mother he knew." If this could be done without giving Mrs. Barrington a shock it would probably put an end to some of her present anxieties.

"Well, Cleeve, I think the best course I can take is to be absolutely candid with you. To tell you the truth, I am not at all convinced that Mrs. Barrington's anxiety to spare you is not aggravating her illness. She has been suffering for some time from very serious heart attacks. Now, my boy, she may live for a long time, but of course, on the other hand, there is no minimising the seriousness of the attacks. In all these cases it is desirable to shelter the patient from as much fatigue *and worry* as possible and I have been very exercised in my mind about Mrs. Barrington's endeavours to keep the knowledge of her illness from you. She has been rather worse the last few days and had a very serious attack this afternoon, and I know that lately she has been worrying more on your account. Perhaps if that anxiety were removed it would be better for her. The one thing to avoid is shock; don't be too impetuous, don't blurt out your knowledge. Let her learn it gradually, and I should think the best thing to do is to tell the Colonel you have had a chat with me, and let him tell your mother."

"There is no minimising the seriousness of the attacks!" The words rang in Cleeve Barrington's brain, that lump in his throat swelled again with a force that drove tears to his eyes, drove them in spite of every effort he could make to control his emotion. His worst suspicions were confirmed, that other morning he had formed the opinion that his mother had not long to live, but . . . "There is no

minimising the seriousness of the attacks!" . . . She might be passing out of his life at that very moment. He longed to be alone, and without looking at Dr. Mornington he walked towards the door.

"You won't be reckless in this, my boy, will you?" Dr. Mornington held out his hand.

Cleeve turned and took it, and the doctor's tightened grip expressed his unspoken sympathy and understanding.

"I don't know what I'll do, Doctor, I haven't thought it out. It's a bit of a shock, you know, but I'll . . . I'll remember what you've said."

CHAPTER XIV

LEAVING the doctor's house, Cleeve Barrington told Griffiths to drive home, while he himself set out to follow the footpath through the fields. The doctor's words had left no doubt in his mind as to the course he should follow, only there would be no beating about the bush as far as he was concerned, no talking it over first with the Guv'nor. He would just blow into his mother's room, as he always did blow in when he had anything serious to talk about, and with some light-hearted chaff or banter let her know he knew all about the secret she was keeping from him.

It would not take long to get home and a vigorous walk would steady his mind, for that lump in his throat still remained, and his mother would be quick enough to see that his light-hearted banter covered other emotions, unless he walked it off. At first he set his mind to concentrate on the reasons which had made her preserve secrecy in a matter which concerned him as much perhaps as it concerned anyone else, but he found it difficult. One moment the words rang in his brain . . . "There is no minimising the seriousness of the attacks," and no sooner had those words wrung his heart than the hope of youth whispered in his ear: "Now, my boy, she may live for a long time, the one thing is to avoid as much fatigue and worry as possible," but the stress which Dr. Mornington had laid on the words "and worry" had not been lost on Cleeve . . . "*And worry.*" What had his mother to worry about? . . . "She has been rather worse the last few days . . . and has been worrying more on your account." . . . "That's what old Mornington said," he mused, "but it's difficult to place one's self in the position of a mother. If I had a son who didn't want to marry I wouldn't worry . . . at least . . . I'm almost sure I wouldn't."

He walked steadily on, concentrating his thoughts on that aspect of the case, recalling the many things his mother had said on the subject of marriage, and finally arrived at the conclusion that his reluctance to marry was the cause of greater anxiety to her than he had imagined, an anxiety which, in his present highly sensitive condition, he now seemed to fully realise.

The more he turned recent happenings over in his mind the more significant they all became and the more significant his mother's altered demeanour appeared. For lately she had ceased to talk about his marrying. Even the other morning, when his father had broached the subject, his mother had said very little. Then, gradually, out of the love he bore her, the full appreciation of the sacrifice she was making dawned upon him.

As the hand of death approached, her importunity had weakened and now clearly he saw it all. She had given up hope of seeing him settled in her lifetime, and that was the cause of her mental anxiety. She was holding back her persuasions and keeping her secret for fear that if he realised it he might be tempted to marry just to ease her mind, just to give her the happiness of seeing her dream fulfilled. How well she understood him, for that was just what he would do. When he reached home he would go at once and tell her he knew all about her illness. That would remove one cause for worry. And then he would go over and ask Muriel Ryder to marry him, there was no reason why he shouldn't, for his ideals had been shattered, his idol broken beyond repair.

As a matter of fact Cleeve really knew nothing of the ways of women, and as his thoughts wandered in wrong directions he laughed to himself with sardonic humour. . . . "The pretty ones are made to kiss . . . that is, the pretty ones like Yvonne; they aren't fit for anything else. They get so much admiration that their heads are turned and then all they think about is having men at their feet and snapping their fingers at their conquests. Later on, when they get older, their freshness gone, their beauty on the wane, they really lay themselves out to attract and marry someone to save their pride. But they are soulless all the time, absolutely soulless! Even when they marry they

still stoop to conquer, like Yvonne." . . . Damn it! why should he be always thinking of Yvonne? He was nothing to her and she had made it clear he never could be. . . . He had better propose to Muriel and have done with it. It was the right thing to do, the only thing in the circumstances.

Like a horse whose breaking in had been deferred too long, he had had things so much his own way that Yvonne's treatment of him had brought out the recklessness of his nature, and under the urge of that recklessness he determined to propose to Muriel, and if she accepted him, as he thought she would, to settle down to his life's ambition, ease his mother's burden and forget all his idle dreams.

"At any rate," he said to himself, "he would be sufficient for Muriel, and he would rather have the love of a girl like that than the love of a soulless wanton!"

Suddenly the sound of voices disturbed his reverie. He was within a few paces of the stile which separated him from the path through the heath plantations. A few words spoken in supplication caught his ear and the voice seemed familiar. Hurrying forward, he leapt the stile, and leaving the pathway, strode in the direction of the sounds. A short, imploring sentence arrested him and he hesitated for a moment.

"Oh, you can't leave me to face it all alone!" . . . Then a man's voice replying angrily, "It was your own fault, wasn't it?" . . . and the heart-broken response, "Oh, how can you speak like that? . . . You can't love me to speak like that!"

Cleeve Barrington stood petrified. He clearly recognised the girl's voice now. It was Maud Bilton's, the daughter of his father's gamekeeper, a girl not yet out of her teens. The pretty innocent child he had always called "Bob" ever since she was seven, when he used to tease her and, among other things, would persist in telling her she was a boy, pretending that her parents were only dressing her up as a girl because she would come in useful to do housework later on; and when she would protest that she was a girl he would still reiterate his belief and tell her that if she knew how scarce domestic servants were she would understand why they put her into petticoats. All this, and more, flashed through his mind as he stood undecided

what to do. He turned as if to retrace his steps, he had no wish to intrude, but his foot caught in the bough of a fallen tree and the crackling of the dead undergrowth as he recovered his balance sounded loud and startling in the silence of the wood. For an instant the voices ceased and then a cry rang out.

"Oh, please don't go! Don't leave me before we've settled this" . . . and the man's angry voice: "Will you let go!" . . . followed by the sound of a blow.

Cleeve Barrington's mind was made up and, striding forward in the direction of the voices, his footsteps reverberated through the wood as he crashed through the undergrowth. The sound of another blow reached his ears before hurrying footsteps warned him that the man was retreating. As Cleeve came in sight of the girl he saw the man rushing headlong through the plantation. He caught only a fleeting glimpse of him, but it was sufficient for recognition, and then he looked down at Bob. She lay full length on the ground, her face buried in her hands, sobbing convulsively. He bent down and touched her shoulder.

"What's the matter, Bob?"

With a startled exclamation she jumped up and faced him. In her anxiety of mind she had not heard his approach, and Cleeve was struck by the pathetic figure she presented, with the tears rolling down her cheeks and two vivid red marks on the sides of her face.

"That brute struck you then?" said Cleeve, with anger flaming in his eyes. "My God, he must have struck you with his clenched fist!"

"No, no, he didn't, Mr. Barrington," she declared in desperate defence. "That . . . that is . . . he didn't mean to," she concluded lamely.

"Bob, you mustn't try to deceive me," said Cleeve sternly. "I heard something of what passed between you; what is the matter?"

"Nothing, Mr. Barrington, really . . . only . . ." Her eyes flickered before his steady gaze and she dropped hers to the ground. "We've only had a little tiff."

"Who is he, Bob? Won't you tell me?" said Cleeve pleadingly, hoping that if he could so worm his way into her confidence as to get her to confess the man's name it

might pave the way for a frank discussion of her trouble.

"My lover, Mr. Barrington." She uttered the word with a finality indicative of an intention to say little more.

"Lover you call him? And does a lover in his love quarrel strike a child with his clenched fist? . . . For you're only a child, Bob."

"You mustn't speak like that, Mr. Barrington! You don't understand. I love him very, very much," she said proudly.

"Who is he?"

"I shan't say." The words were spoken inoffensively, with a sigh of relief at the knowledge that her lover had not been recognised.

"I wonder if it's Michael Tennant? . . . And I also wonder, Bob, whether your father knows about this?"

All her confidence crumpled up, her face grew white, while the look of a hunted animal crept into her eyes.

"How do you know?" she exclaimed involuntarily.

"I caught sight of him as he ran away. You know, Bob, I don't pay much attention to gossip, but I've heard one or two ugly rumours about Michael Tennant and the less you have to do with him the better, I should say. I don't think he's a gentleman and I don't trust him, anyway. If it hadn't been for Major Forsyth taking him up no one would ever have taken any notice of him; every man about here dislikes him more or less, and I'm afraid that if you listen to him you may be ruined body and soul."

And then all at once he regretted he had uttered the words. There was something in the shiver of apprehension she gave that told him the thing he was warning her against was already done. With comprehending eyes he saw the dark rings under hers and his fists clenched tightly.

"Tennant shall pay for this," he said in an ominously quiet voice. "If he doesn't marry you I'll thrash him till he can't stand."

"You'll do no such thing, Mr. Barrington," she cried, stamping her foot. "He loves me and . . ." Here she faced him with reborn pride in her eyes . . . "and I love him!"

"Bob, you know you're only trying to deceive yourself. You know he loves you no more than he loved other girls

he has ruined. He came here from Switzerland because he was hounded out, and by God, I'll hound him out of this!"

"Please, Mr. Barrington, oh, please don't! I'll go mad if you do! Leave me! Leave me!" she cried, as she sank to the ground again and began to sob pitifully.

Cleeve looked down at her uncertainly; she looked such a frail broken figure that he hesitated to leave her in that lonely wood.

"Please go, Mr. Barrington, you can't do anything for me now. . . . I don't want you to do anything, only leave me alone." She spoke the words wildly, spasmodically, her body convulsed with hysterical sobs.

Cleeve saw she was almost beside herself with grief, and although unversed in the ways of women, some instinct told him she would be better left alone. So quietly, without a word, he walked slowly away, listening intently for any untoward sounds, and shortly, when nothing broke the stillness, he quickened his steps and continued his way home.

* * * * *

Arriving at Longton Hall, Cleeve Barrington rushed up the great central staircase leading from the hall, and giving a few gentle taps on his mother's door, entered in his usual light-hearted manner.

"Hello, mother, had one of your little attacks again, eh?"

"Cleeve!" Mrs. Barrington's voice was full of pained astonishment. Cleeve bent down and, putting his arm round her neck, gave her a warm kiss.

"Oh, you needn't say 'Cleeve,' mother! You thought you were hiding these attacks from me, didn't you? What would you say to Cleeve now if he were ill and didn't tell you?"

"Cleeve!"

"No, it's no use saying 'Cleeve.' You don't get round me like that. . . . You'd be very cross with me. But I'm not cross with you, I don't make mountains out of molehills, like somebody I know!"

Mrs. Barrington gave a little laugh, and Cleeve Barrington knew he had lifted part of the load from her mind.

CHAPTER XV

THE door opened and Yvonne tiptoed in, telegram in hand. "Aunt Eloise!"

The words were uttered softly with that deference which members of the younger generation assume when they disturb the afternoon nap of elders whom they love and respect.

Mrs. de Haviland awoke from her reverie. Sitting in an easy chair before the fire, for the afternoon was chilly, she had allowed her thoughts to dream. Helen Courtney had returned home, summoned by an urgent telegram from her doctor to the effect that Mr. Courtney was suffering from an attack of "flu," and her friend's departure, for perhaps the first time in Mrs. de Haviland's life, had left her with a sense of relief rather than regret.

Unconsciously Mrs. Courtney had exercised a depressing effect on Eloise de Haviland. In a rash moment she had promised to help her friend in her matrimonial designs, and although in the letter she had not gone back on that promise, in spirit she had. Deep down in her heart she did not approve of Mrs. de Haviland's scheme.

According to her creed, married women had no right to try and supplant the unmarried, and Eloise de Haviland's attitude of mind with regard to Yvonne and Cleeve was to her an enigma. That her friend could do anything fundamentally wrong she would not admit; that in justice and equity Yvonne's bonds should be broken she did not doubt, she accepted Mrs. de Haviland's word for that; the gulf she could not bridge was the gulf between active and passive assistance. If Yvonne of her own free choice was prepared to sacrifice everything for Cleeve Barrington, she argued, and he equally was prepared to sacrifice everything for her, then she could lend countenance to the inevitable. But to lend countenance to an artificial inevitable was, not-

withstanding her promise to Eloise de Haviland, repugnant to her finer senses, and so unconsciously, while she had given lip-service to the plot—for Mrs. Courtney considered it nothing but a plot—she had been incapable of giving heart-service, and Mrs. de Haviland was well aware that her friend's want of enthusiasm was weakening her own resolve.

Now that her friend had taken her departure Mrs. de Haviland's strength of purpose returned and aided by that return of mental strength, her weakness of the morning appeared not only unjustified, but ridiculous. It was not so much the construction which Mrs. Courtney had put on the events of the previous evening that had carried conviction at the time, as the undercurrent of disapproval, almost amounting to implied censure, which Mrs. de Haviland had subconsciously read into her friend's words.

In the quiet of her own drawing room, with her friend gone and under the influence of a cheerful fire, Mrs. de Haviland could not understand her unwarranted depression of the morning. The happenings which had exercised her mind were symptoms which lent themselves to a totally different diagnosis from that which Helen Courtney had arrived at. . . . Cleeve had not danced with Yvonne because of some misunderstanding between them. It was only a natural and ordinary struggle for mastership between lovers. Cleeve was no child, but a man who, for all his impetuosity, could steel himself to wait for fruit to ripen.

Why had she forgotten that trait? she mused. Cleeve's quarrel with Colonel St. Ledger on Muriel Ryder's account had really no significance as far as his leanings towards that girl were concerned, for everyone knew that Cleeve Barrington was always prepared to defend the under-dog, and when the under-dog was a woman, and the blows undeserved insults, it took very little to turn his defence into attack. Then there was that episode of the nightdress. He was under the impression that he had slept in Yvonne's room, what was more natural than he should think it was hers? All men, no matter how strong-minded, attached a romantic sentimental value to anything their idols had worn. How could she have come to the absurd conclusion that he had taken it away to have it repaired? His present

attitude to Yvonne was easily explained. . . . She had interrupted him in the act of proposing to Muriel Ryder, time and propinquity had gradually but surely clouded a vision which had once enthralled him. His mental picture had lost its vividness, the face which had been photographed on his brain five years ago had faded. His mother's illness had momentarily turned the picture face to the wall, and, like a man whose dream was past recall, he had yielded to the prompting of his manhood. Then as if by magic the picture with all its vividness had suddenly returned, the allurements of real flesh and blood had re-intensified its outlines. Yvonne had suddenly emerged from the faded background of that almost forgotten past like an avenging angel.

Caught in his weakness, he had vented his feelings of revulsion, as man always does, on the only woman who really mattered. Mrs. de Haviland felt she could see it all. *Her* almost forgotten past resurrected itself and sensitised her perspicacity. Her dream had been recreated and it was in the buoyancy of hope that she gave Yvonne a welcome smile.

She felt a thrill of pride at the picture which her niece presented. The rebellious look had disappeared. Those deep violet eyes had taken on a browner, softer tint, and the dark rings under them accentuated their pleading, supplicating expression. The transparency of her skin gave the whole face a frail appearance, the chin seemed to have lost some of its roundness, but two patches of colour in her cheeks and her vivid rosy lips proclaimed the purity of the warm healthy blood which coursed through her veins.

"Why, Yvonne, you're all eyes to-day, and your face seems ever so much smaller. Come in, my dear, you look cold. . . . Why haven't you put a wrap on? It's chilly to-day and that slim white neck of yours looks as though it wants protecting."

"Oh, Aunt Eloise, don't!" The telegram fluttered to the floor, and throwing her arms round Mrs. de Haviland's neck Yvonne fought her tears.

"Why, child, what's the matter?" Mrs. de Haviland's hand found its way to the chestnut hair and her fingers fondled a rebellious little curl which looked as though it

wanted to undo itself and let the world see that the ear it partially hid should never have been hidden at all. Her other hand sought Yvonne's waist and as she drew her niece closer the waist yielded with the supineness of youth, throwing into greater relief the graceful contour of her hips.

"I've got to go, Aunt Eloise."

"You've got to go? Yvonne! what do you mean?" And then Mrs. de Haviland's eyes fell on the telegram lying on the floor. She stooped and picked it up. The words "RETURN IMMEDIATELY" fired themselves into her brain.

"Yvonne, when did this come?"

There was a pause, for Yvonne could not trust herself to answer, while Mrs. de Haviland's reborn hope turned to despair.

"This is a bitter disappointment, Yvonne. Oh, my child, am I never to get to know you? Is your auntie never to know anything of your love?"

Yvonne nestled her head deeper into Mrs. de Haviland's shoulder, and throwing her arm lovingly round her aunt's neck, she burst out with the words: "Auntie, auntie, I don't *want* to go!"

"Then you shan't! I'll write to Gerald and tell him it's impossible. I won't have you taken away like this."

"But I must go, Aunt Eloise, I must! You don't know."

"I know a great deal more than you think, my child. I know how to talk to Gerald, and after you've stayed with me a little while I think you'll play your own cards better."

"What do you mean, auntie dear?"

"What I say; I won't have you treated as though you can't be trusted."

Yvonne laughed hysterically.

"But really I can't understand this telegram," continued Mrs. de Haviland perplexedly.

"I'm to go back," said Yvonne hastily.

"I know that. But why has the telegram been sent to you instead of me? And it's so peremptory, not a word of apology, no consideration for my feelings. . . . You were to stay a fortnight, you know."

A guilty flush swept Yvonne's cheeks, and something

prompted her to try to temper the blow her aunt had received.

"Don't be upset, Aunt Eloise, it's for my good I'm going. . . . I'm sure it is," she added as though anxious to assure herself.

Mrs. de Haviland took Yvonne's hand in hers and caressed it clingingly. "You don't know what a blow this is to me, dear. Oh, why has he done it, Yvonne, why has he?"

There was a moment's silence, and Mrs. de Haviland looked so dejected that Yvonne doubted the wisdom of the step she had taken in prompting the despatch of that telegram. She had done it in the heat of her temper, and now she was filled with remorse. With anyone but her aunt, Yvonne might have been tempted to let matters remain as they were. She felt that even her aunt was not entitled to share the deep secret she cherished in her heart. Her love for Cleeve was too deep, too sacred for its knowledge to be shared with anyone, not even with him, his own acts had rendered that impossible.

The professional love maker, as she considered him, should never know that the strong swift strokes of the practised hand at the game had moved her more than any amateur, who worshipped woman as a heavenly being of another world, could have done. On the other hand, it was against her nature to deceive, and particularly repugnant to her to deceive her aunt, and so, while she was in this hesitating frame of mind, a remark of Mrs. de Haviland's suddenly decided her to confess so much as would make the part she had played clear.

"You mustn't blame him this time, Aunt Eloise, it was I who asked him to send the wire, I couldn't stay here any longer."

"My dear child! . . . What are you saying? You *wanted* to go back?" Mrs. de Haviland looked pained and astonished as she gasped out the words.

"I couldn't help it, I'm so unhappy."

"But why? Haven't we been kind to you, Yvonne? Haven't *I* been kind to you? . . . Why, there's nothing I wouldn't do for you, Yvonne, nothing in this world!"

"I know, Aunt Eloise, but isn't that I'm unhappy,

not really. Only . . . only . . .” Yvonne felt she could not finish the sentence.

“Then stay! Send another telegram to say your first one was a mistake.”

“I couldn’t do that,” Yvonne said decidedly. “It’s done now. Besides another wire wouldn’t be understood, and I’d have to go back to explain, you know I would.”

“I suppose you would,” Mrs. de Haviland acquiesced quietly, realising even before Yvonne spoke that what she suggested was impossible. Then she put out her hands and drew Yvonne’s face with its anxious, worried look towards her and kissed it forgivingly.

Something in that kiss brought the tears to Yvonne’s eyes and she repented more than ever her hasty action.

“But you can tell me what made you do it, Yvonne?” Mrs. de Haviland added appealingly.

“It was Mr. Barrington.” The words were out before she could check them, and as she realised their significance a deep red blush rose to her cheeks.

“Mr. Barrington,” repeated Mrs. de Haviland mechanically. Had her plans really miscarried? The tone of Yvonne’s voice was indicative of deep emotion; was the drive behind it love or hate? “Mr. Barrington, Yvonne? What has *he* done?”

Yvonne did not at once reply. She couldn’t quite understand her feelings; now that the time had come for her to leave she didn’t want to go. And then the remembrance of Cleeve Barrington’s influence over her almost threw her into a panic, and the knowledge returned that if she stayed she could not deny him for long.

“I have to go, Aunt Eloise,” she replied agitatedly. “I can’t trust myself. I don’t know what it is about Mr. Barrington, but he fascinates me.”

Her face crimsoned again as she realised her secret was out at last. Discretion left her as the knowledge came that, in some subtle incomprehensible way, her aunt was to be the keeper of her conscience.

“Fascinates’ you, Yvonne? Are you sure it’s *only* fascination?”

Yvonne felt the words tearing away her mask; between her and her aunt there seemed to rear itself the phantom of

her soul. Her aunt could see it as she saw it, naked and exposed.

"Fascination!" She rose and faced her aunt, an unnatural laugh escaped her. "No, Aunt Eloise, I don't know why I used the word. . . . To retain a shred of self-respect, I suppose. . . . No, it's not fascination, Auntie. . . ."

"Then what is it, Yvonne? You can tell me."

"Can I?"

"Yes!"

Yvonne looked long into Mrs. de Haviland's eyes and then, as though no word was too strong to express her self-contempt, one word came falteringly from her lips.

"Yvonne, you mustn't use such a word! You poor demented child, you don't know what you're saying!"

"Oh, yes, I do! He kissed me, he kissed Muriel Ryder! He put his arm round my waist, he put his arm round Muriel's. . . . And I *liked* it, liked it even while I saw that vision of Muriel in his arms and read the look of passion in his eyes. For there was passion in mine, I know it! And he knows it, he *must* know it! It's for your sake and father's I'm going, I'm not thinking of anyone else. Oh, yes, Aunt Eloise, I *know* it! I can't help it, I don't *want* to help it. No one can expect anything else when I don't know who my mother is!"

"Yvonne! Yvonne!! You must not talk like this." There was an anxious, frightened look in Mrs. de Haviland's eyes which Yvonne misread.

"Aunt Eloise, don't stop me! No one can hate me as I hate myself."

"For letting Cleeve Barrington kiss you? . . . There's no harm in a kiss."

"There's no harm when you don't want them. But . . . but," Yvonne floundered for a moment and then her words came with a rush. "But I *want* his kisses, I can't help myself. Oh! can't you see I *have* to go?" she ended pathetically.

Mrs. de Haviland saw that the storm was spending itself. Tears ran unheeded down Yvonne's cheeks. She was like a broken reed, imploring support. Her eyes expressed

the misery of her wounded self-respect and Mrs. de Haviland sensed the appeal for comfort.

"Yvonne, we women don't always understand our emotions. They overwhelm us at times, but it doesn't follow that we're always wrong to give way to them, my child, and when you've had time to think over your feelings you may think what I think."

Yvonne looked up at her aunt, but read in her eyes no strained effort to console, they spoke of an understanding feeling of sympathy, the words of comfort were spontaneous.

"What do you think, Auntie, dear?"

"I think, Yvonne, what *you* will think later on, and you will hate that word you used when you realise that a nobler instinct made you want those kisses. No, Yvonne, I don't want to influence you now," Mrs. de Haviland added quickly to check a response from her niece. "I think after what you've told me I should not be doing right in trying to detain you. There's a good train at ten in the morning. I'll send Gerald a wire saying you will go by that."

"I'd better go to-day," Yvonne objected, and then added unwillingly: "Mr. Barrington is dining here to-night and after what has happened I don't want to meet him again. There's a train at four, I think. I can stay the night in town and go on in the morning."

"No, Yvonne dear," said Mrs. de Haviland quietly, as she rose from her chair. "You go and lie down and I'll bring you a cup of tea later on. Meanwhile I'll phone Longton Hall and tell Cleeve that we're all very tired after the dance and we're going to bed early. He won't mind coming another time, I'm sure."

When the door closed on Yvonne, Mrs. de Haviland picked up the telephone receiver, but it was a trunk and not a local call for which she asked and a few minutes later she was speaking to Helen Courtney.

"How's Richard, Helen?"

"Well, he's much better, Eloise, I'm pleased to say. He's worrying about his will though. He wants Cleeve to be one of the executors and now he has a slight temperature he's fretting about it."

As these words reached Mrs. de Haviland's ears she drew a breath of relief. She had intended telling her friend that Yvonne was leaving on Cleeve's account, and imploring her

assistance. Now it would be unnecessary to tell Mrs. Courtney anything on the phone; what she had to say she could say later on.

"If he's worrying about that he can't be very bad," replied Mrs. de Haviland laughingly. "Why don't you ring up Cleeve and ask him to come and see Richard about it? It would cheer him up to have a talk with Cleeve, and I don't think Cleeve has anything particular to do."

"I was just going to do that when your call came through. I'm going to ask him to come up to-morrow by the ten train and stop the night with us."

Mrs. de Haviland could scarcely believe her ears. She had intended asking Helen Courtney to invite Cleeve Barrington to visit Richard on some pretext or other, and to suggest that he should travel by the ten train, and here was her friend on her own initiative making the suggestion herself. Perhaps her scheme was going to be favoured by fate after all.

When Mrs. Courtney rang off Mrs. de Haviland asked to be put through to Longton Hall. Elton's voice answered her.

"Will you ask Mr. Cleeve to speak to me."

"He's not here, madam, but we're expecting him at any moment."

"When he comes in, then, tell him that if he could come over to tea instead of dinner I should be very pleased. We're tired after the dance, he'll understand."

"Very well, madam."

CHAPTER XVI

MRS. DE HAVILAND paused in the act of pouring out a cup of tea for herself. "Have you any news, Cleeve?"

Cleeve Barrington replaced his cup on the saucer he was holding in his left hand. "News? Mrs. de Haviland. Yes, quite a lot." He accompanied his words with a frank, crinkly smile. "The fact is I have so much I don't know where to begin."

"Anything to do with you?"

"Yes. To borrow a phrase from the modern novel writer, 'I am very much in the picture'!"

"Well, begin at the beginning or at the most exciting part, I don't care which."

"I think the most exciting part has been cut out."

"What a pity! Whose fault is that?"

"Yours, I should say."

"Mine?" responded Mrs. de Haviland incredulously. Then, noticing the expression of banter on Cleeve's face, she smiled understandingly. "Cleeve, you're always teasing me! You mean my family dinner party?"

He gave a little chuckle. "Yes. I wanted to meet Yvonne again."

Mrs. de Haviland placed her hand on his arm. "I had to put you off, Cleeve, you're too impetuous!"

"Impetuous!" He gave a laugh. "I wasn't impetuous, I was mad! I suppose she has told you how I behaved?"

Mrs. de Haviland nodded.

"Well, I haven't accepted your invitation to tea with the express intention to apologise. But——"

Mrs. de Haviland held up a restraining hand. "Apologise, Cleeve? . . . There's no need for apology, it never entered my head when I asked you to come to tea to——"

"I know what you're going to say, that you can trust

me and all that. So you can, but although I wouldn't admit it to Yvonne, I'm really sorry I called her that beastly name."

"What beastly name, Cleeve? I've heard nothing about it."

"She hasn't told you?"

"No, she only hinted at a misunderstanding of some sort."

"Well, I called her a——"

"No, Cleeve, I won't listen. Whatever words passed between you keep them to yourselves. You never know what the future holds. We all say things in the heat of passion we don't mean, and there's no passion like the anger which misunderstandings between a boy—for you're little more than a boy, Cleeve—and a girl can create. Forget what you've said, but remember Yvonne's only a child and I think it quite possible you don't understand her and have driven her too far. You don't know how *lovable* she is."

There perhaps would have been some excuse for Cleeve if he had blurted out the retort that sprang to his lips,—
"A *child* you call her? Does a child use her personal attractions to extract an avowal of love and then twiddle a wedding ring in derision under your nose?"—for only half an hour ago he had proposed to Muriel Ryder, and had been accepted, and the very acceptance which he had almost prayed for beforehand had struck his heart with a cold chill. But to belittle one who had made such an appeal to him, as Yvonne had, was repugnant to his sense of chivalry, and even had he been tempted to belittle her, that word "*lovable*" would have silenced his tongue. The word went to his torn heart like a ministering angel. "*Lovable*" that was what he'd always thought her. His eyes dropped as a soft caressing expression crept into them. *Had* he taken Yvonne the wrong way, was she still the lovable girl he had always imagined her to be? Something cried within him for confirmation. He felt if he could still cherish that picture of her in his heart even life with Muriel Ryder would have its compensations. His idol in spite of all would live and remain his idol, although she would ever belong to someone else.

"You don't know her," Mrs. de Haviland continued. "Very few people do. Her nature is just one vast unfathomable sea of affection and loyalty, not only loyalty to those she loves but loyalty to herself, loyalty to every womanly instinct worthy of the name. You'll say she's my niece, I know, but I'm not one to be unduly influenced by that. I'm not blind to *anyone's* faults. That slim figure of hers holds a nature which doesn't belie her face. She's as true as steel, as high spirited as a thoroughbred. But creep into her heart and all her spirit and defiance is replaced by a love which overwhelms you. She becomes a child, trusting you as she trusts herself, giving you a love as pure and unselfish as she expects from you. She's slow to give, Cleeve, but once she gives she gives all, not for to-day or to-morrow but for always. I would like to tell you that her father has made sacrifices which few men would make, but should occasion arise, unless I sadly misjudge Yvonne, she is capable of making even greater sacrifices."

Whether it was Mrs. de Haviland's words, Cleeve's thoughts, or the disturbing effects of the conversation he had had with Dr. Mornington, matters little, but the caressing expression which had crept into his eyes deepened as Mrs. de Haviland spoke. He saw the pattern of the carpet, blurred as if enveloped in a mist. Then, as Mrs. de Haviland's conversation ended, he turned his head towards the window and for a few moments gazed abstractedly across the lawn. It was a perfectly still afternoon, but a leaf somehow managed to detach itself from a branch and fluttered slowly, idly, to the ground.

"Have you any other news?" asked Mrs. de Haviland, after a few moments' silence, as though to efface her previous remarks.

With an effort Cleeve broke off his thoughts. It was done with, that dream of the past, it had fallen as the leaf had fallen. The new dream might be a nightmare, but it was all his making, though only one would know that.

"May I smoke?" and barely waiting for permission he opened his case, selected a cigarette, tapped it hurriedly and, lighting it, threw the dead match with energy into the fire.

“Well, from a woman’s point of view I have some very exciting news,” and as he uttered the words he faced Mrs. de Haviland again with that forced smile on his face.

The smile did not deceive Mrs. de Haviland. She knew what was coming.

“An engagement, Cleeve?”

He nodded and turning his head slowly away stared into the fire.

Mrs. de Haviland watched his movements with an apprehensive feeling. The thing she most dreaded had certainly come to pass.

“Whose?” she demanded in a quiet voice which belied the spasmodic heaving of her bosom as she waited for his reply, which came out with a finality that warned her she would not get much more information out of Cleeve that day.

“Mine!”

The blow, for it was a blow to Mrs. de Haviland, fell on prepared ground. There was nothing in her face to indicate that she was acting under any other influence than that of curiosity.

“It’s never very exciting to hear a *man* is engaged, is it, Cleeve? You’ve only told half the story.”

Cleeve looked at her for a moment and his eyes were thoughtful as though he were unravelling a difficult problem. Then suddenly he blew out a puff of smoke, and rising from the chair, strolled over to the window and stood for a while looking at the fallen leaf. Mrs. de Haviland rose too, and crossing over, placed her hand on his shoulder and said softly, “Who is it, Cleeve?”

He turned and faced her with that smile again on his face, only perhaps it appeared harder and more forced.

“Muriel Ryder,” he answered slowly, and the smile faded as he saw the slight wince she gave. The next moment he thought he must have been mistaken, for she was heartily congratulating him.

“But for fate your congratulations might have been a mockery.”

“What do you mean, Cleeve?”

"I might have been engaged to a woman whom a short time back I thought had the ugliest soul on earth."

"D'you think it now?"

"I can't say."

"Has she a pretty exterior?" queried Mrs. de Haviland laughingly.

"Such women always have," he replied bitterly. "But I'd be fool enough now to say something silly again if I got the chance."

"The man who can't be a fool sometimes, Cleeve, is not worth loving."

"Let's change the subject, shall we? . . . I want to get away from here for a time, and I have suggested to Mr. Ryder that we have a little pheasant shooting together. . . . Can you help me?"

"Surely you both get enough shooting round here?"

"Yes, we do. But I want to go away, I feel I want a little change, so does the padre."

Mrs. de Haviland walked back to her chair and reseated herself before replying.

"I think I can help you. As a matter of fact there is a little shoot up in Norfolk which a friend of mine wants to let and I think I could get it for you. It's only about a thousand acres, Cleeve, the keeper shared with a neighbouring estate, last year's bag about 300 pheasants, 50 hares. Shooting box with three reception rooms, billiard room, ten bed and dressing rooms. . . . I've got all the particulars, you see. . . . I should think that's just what you want."

"I think it's rather small, and there's bound to be complications with the other estate. Besides, we'd be bored stiff in a month in such a small shoot."

"No, you wouldn't. There is sailing on the broads, and it's quite close to the old town of Becclesfield. You know how that will delight Mr. Ryder. He's so fond of poking about quaint old towns, and you can take Muriel sailing when you like."

"Yes, I forgot that," said Cleeve, almost as though he were disappointed, and then brightening a little, he added: "And Mr. Ryder isn't too well off, so I suppose we'll have to consider the price. . . . Is it fairly reasonable?"

"Quite," Mrs. de Haviland replied reassuringly. "The people who are letting it are friends of mine, and they're more concerned about getting tenants who will take care of their furniture than about getting a good price. The house is full of priceless old Chippendale, it's a perfect little show place."

Cleeve's face darkened. "Well, of course, left to myself," he said gloomily, "I should want a bigger shoot, but I've got to consider the old padre's pocket, and you know what a stickler he is about paying his fair share."

"I should think it's just the thing for the two of you. I believe my friend would take a hundred and fifty pounds, but they're only letting it for a month. Would you like me to write now and make sure of it?"

"Yes, please do," murmured Cleeve.

Mrs. de Haviland crossed over to the *escritoire*, and taking up a pen, commenced to write. . . .

"MY DEAR MILLICENT,

"Once you told me you would do me any favour in the world, so I have taken you at your word and let your shooting without your consent! I have fixed the price at £150 (I couldn't charge any more, as the Rev. Mr. Ryder wants to share it with Cleeve Barrington, and the rector can't afford much) and like a good Samaritan you can give that as an offering for my peace of mind to any charity you like. I've promised they can have it from the first of October for a month, so just pack everything and come and stay with me. I'll get your boys as much pheasant shooting here as they want.

"Millicent, you *must* do this for me, you know why. . . ."

Mrs. de Haviland, having scribbled off the letter, turned round on her chair, and with perfectly ingenuous frankness offered to read what she had written.

Cleeve started and looked up quickly. He had been immersed in thought and had not quite caught her question.

"Would you like me to read what I've written, Cleeve?" Mrs. de Haviland repeated.

"Yes, if it's not private."

Holding the letter out in front of her, Mrs. de Haviland commenced a recital. . . .

"DEAR LADY MAINWARING,

"I received your letter asking me if I could possibly get a tenant for your shooting. I have agreed to let it for the sum you name to Mr. Cleeve Barrington whom I think you have met, and the Rev. Mr. Charles Ryder. I can promise you that the furniture will be well looked after, so you need have no concern on that account. I'm sorry that rapacious old milliner thinks you've more money than sense!

"I'm very glad I have been able to arrange this for you, as I can now count on your coming here with Charlie and Alec. . . ."

"You see what a good turn you've done me, Cleeve," she said. "I'm very fond of Lady Mainwaring. By the way, the postscript's interesting. Shall I read it?" and without waiting for him to reply, she continued:

"P.S.—Cleeve Barrington is engaged to Muriel Ryder, so your snug little drawing room will make a pretty setting for the love-birds to bill and coo in!"

"I hope you won't give me that letter to post!" retorted Cleeve ominously.

"Why not?" Mrs. de Haviland said in feigned astonishment.

"Because with that postscript I shouldn't post it."

Mrs. de Haviland heaved a sigh of regret. "What a pity you don't like it, Cleeve. Now I suppose I can't put it in."

"But you have put it in."

"Oh, no, I haven't! It was just a suggestion of mine, and of course if you don't want to bill and coo there's no need for it," she added blandly.

Cleeve rose to go and Mrs. de Haviland gave a laugh of mingled amusement and satisfaction as she watched him get into his car and drive away. Then she went up to Yvonne's room and tactfully broke the news of what she considered a perfectly ridiculous engagement. But of Cleeve's journey to town by the ten o'clock train and the letting of the shooting at Becclesfield she spoke not a word.

CHAPTER XVII

THE train was steaming into the station as Mrs. de Haviland's car drove up to the entrance.

"You run and get your ticket, Yvonne," said Mrs. de Haviland. "Cécile and I will see to your luggage."

She waited until Yvonne reached the booking office and then hurriedly sought the platform. She was just in time to see Cleeve Barrington jump into an empty first-class carriage, which she carefully noted before rejoining Yvonne.

There was not much time to lose and when a porter had put the luggage into the van Mrs. de Haviland rejoined her niece and, hurrying along the platform, she opened a first-class carriage door, and Yvonne jumped in just as the guard blew his whistle.

"Good-bye, Aunt Eloise," Yvonne said softly as she leant through the carriage window and kissed Mrs. de Haviland's upturned face.

* * * * *

"Good afternoon, Mrs. du Barry. This is an unexpected pleasure!"

"An unexpected hate, Mr. Barrington!"

Cleeve gave a quick searching look at her face, but was unable to detect any signs of annoyance in her expression. On the other hand, he could perceive no decided signs of pleasure.

As a matter of fact Yvonne had not yet made up her mind whether she was pleased or not with the situation. All she was aware of was that she somehow felt a sense of latent excitement, but an excitement which should be suppressed, at the thought that for an hour or more until the train arrived at London she would be alone with Cleeve Barrington. She stole a swift glance at him from under her lashes as he began speaking again.

"Do you ever give in?" he said pleadingly. "When we're compelled to travel together why should we occupy our time in hating?"

The words "do you ever give in?" melted the artificial hardness which she had thrown into her words. She had been dying to "give in" ever since he had called her that horrible name. For some reason which no rational explanation could justify it had just needed that word to pierce her armour, and the contempt expressed in his voice as he uttered it had cut her to the quick and made her realise more poignantly than ever the yearnings of her heart. For the first time in her life her heart had been wounded, and though she did not know how deep was the wound, or what pain it would in time create, she knew when they parted in the rose garden that she loved Cleeve Barrington as she would never love anyone again. It was that knowledge forcing itself into her mind which made her eyes grow soft as she replied in a low regretful tone: "An unkind fate seems to render it impossible, don't you think?"

"What do you mean? I can't see what fate has to do with it," he said, speaking the first words that came to his lips, words which really belied his own belief.

"Fate brought us together, didn't it? And whenever we meet it seems to produce a quarrel from nowhere. I'm sure you've hated me and I think I . . . have . . . "

"Yes?"

"Well," Yvonne continued reluctantly, "I suppose I've had the same feeling for you."

Cleeve Barrington turned his head and looked out of the window before replying; this girl of many moods was an enigma to him. He was struggling with his desire to succumb once more to the irresistible charm she seemed to exercise, struggling with his sense of honour, and struggling with the thought that if he once let drop his shield her mood would change to one of malicious amusement. But even as he struggled he knew the fight was lost.

"They say hate is really akin to love," he said before he could stay the words and then, as she remained silent, he continued recklessly: "Shall we cheat fate this time?"

"And?" she added in an expressionless voice.

"Be nice," he concluded impulsively.

“Do you think you could?” she laughed gently. “Wouldn’t the change be too much for us?”

Cleeve looked at her, and suddenly remembered and regretted the impetuosity which had prompted him to become engaged to Muriel Ryder. He wondered if Yvonne had heard the news, and then laughed exultantly. Why should he regret anything? He had only *promised* to marry, and this tantalising creature beside him, already married, had laid herself out to attract and then, when she had succeeded, taken a delight in flaunting her wedding ring under his nose. If she could play with fire why shouldn’t he? There was some mystery about Yvonne he felt sure, but that she was married he had no doubt. He had questioned Mrs. de Haviland about it on the night of the dance and that lady had looked very enigmatical as she replied: “Why do you want to know, Cleeve? Are you attracted?” He had contented himself with shrugging his shoulders and Mrs. de Haviland had added: “I thought you had a reputation for acting first and thinking afterwards.” . . . “Perhaps I’ve earned it in this case,” he had answered. “Who knows? . . . But I would not from choice marry a widow, and I certainly wouldn’t like to lose my heart to a married woman.” . . . He had missed the twinkle in Mrs. de Haviland’s eyes as she replied, “Well, she’s not a widow, Cleeve, and you’d have to face a very irate gentleman if you trod on that grass plot.” And then, looking him straight in the face she had added: “I wouldn’t think any more about her if I were you. My own impression is that if a man doesn’t like anyone sufficiently to get over his antipathy for widowhood his attraction is only skin deep.”

Cleeve had not replied; he knew his attraction was more than skin deep, but that reference to the grass plot and Yvonne’s behaviour in the rose garden had convinced him that she was married.

Now in spite of that knowledge, in spite of his sense of honour, he had a rising and overwhelming desire to play with fire. . . . “You don’t know how lovable she is,” Mrs. de Haviland had said; those words had somehow carried conviction and that conviction now doped his conscience. It spoke the words of the serpent in his ears. . . . “If you

can make sure that all Mrs. de Haviland said is true your ideals will be restored. Your faith in woman will live again. When you proposed to Muriel were you actuated by love or some other impulse? Are not most marriages failures? Would the woman by your side act as she has done if hers were a heaven blessed union? Do you want to add another marriage to the long, long list of failures? Be sensible, Cleeve, for you now have the opportunity to choose one of two things. . . . Loyalty to a promise, in making which you were not a free agent, and the unhappiness it will surely bring—or the restoration of your faith and love,” and while he listened to the temptation of the serpent he lingered on her words. . . . “Wouldn’t the change be too much for us?” Somehow he was glad she had used the word “us.”

“Besides,” said Yvonne, breaking in suddenly on his thoughts, “what’s the use of being nice? We only quarrel in the end. You see, Mr. Barrington, you’ve had matters so much your own way, haven’t you?” There was just a slight ring of bitterness in her voice.

“I think one always does when one’s not very keen about it, don’t you?”

Yvonne turned her head quickly and gave a merry girlish laugh. “What a compliment! You express a desire to cheat fate and follow it up with a remark which makes me infer you’re not very keen about it!”

The laugh was infectious; Cleeve gave a very audible chuckle. “Oh, yes, I am! And it isn’t that we’re locked up together for an hour that made me say it. To tell you the truth, I’m awfully sorry for what I said in the rose garden, I don’t know what made me do it; I suppose it was the sudden knowledge that you were not free to love.”

“But I *am* free to love.”

“Mrs. du Barry, don’t say that. It hurts. No married woman is free to love; don’t destroy my faith.”

“But I am. Perhaps we look on things differently from men. Some of us have to marry . . . circumstances, you know . . . and some of us aren’t frank, we pretend we love when we don’t, but others make it quite clear when they marry that they don’t love and never will. I think

the latter are quite free to love, don't you? . . . That is, when they can't help it."

"I don't know," said Cleeve a little sarcastically. "I thought when a woman married she took a vow to love, honour and obey."

"Yes, but it appears to me that a vow to love when you've made it perfectly clear that you don't love is not binding. Anyway, aren't we getting a little bit out of our depths? You can never quite put yourself in another's position." She smiled and then added slowly, "I can love, Mr. Barrington, and when the right man comes along I shall love him, and no vow I've ever taken will prevent me, even though I can never marry him."

"But isn't that rather a hopeless kind of love?"

"I suppose it is, but it's also rather unselfish."

It was now Cleeve's turn to have his armour penetrated. The word "unselfish" struck him a sudden blow. He looked at Yvonne to see if the word had been used intentionally, but she was staring out of the window with a far-away look in her eyes, and he realised how accidental its utterance was. Yes, that was what was wrong with his love. At the Three Arts Ball five years ago it had been selfish, he had not considered her, only his own desires. It had only been of himself he was thinking when they had had that scene in Mrs. de Haviland's ball room. It had only been his own desires of which he had been thinking when he had made that proposal to her in the rose garden. He had not thought of her wishes, he had just tried to reap where he had not sown. He felt he wanted to, *must* explain. He wished to set himself right in Yvonne's estimation, but had he been wise he would have left matters as they were. Unknown to himself he loved this girl too deeply to bare his soul. The desire to stand well in her estimation was a bar to his belittling himself, and he did not realise that such an understanding as his circumstances permitted must perforce undermine her self-respect. He had never been in a similar position before, and did not know that he was bound to act as most people act when they are in love. . . . On the defensive.

"Mrs. du Barry, I think I owe you an apology for the

way I have acted and spoken lately. I want to explain things, if you will let me?"

Yvonne was stirred; she wanted an explanation, one which would enable her to be frank with herself, one that would permit her to cherish her love for him. She was aware that he had become engaged to Muriel Ryder and, woman-like, she wanted some salve for her conscience. She knew that he *had* to marry, she had heard the reasons from her aunt, and so she made allowances for him. But waiting, hanging on his words, hoping that he would tell her that had things been different she and he might have been more to one another than friends, she whispered—she could do no more than whisper, her emotions were too strong—"I would like you to, for there is something I, too, want to get off my mind."

"Well, I've already told you that I love you, but now I want to tell you that it is the kind of love that drives me mad. It seems to appeal to a perverse instinct in me—a desire to possess—and I'm sure there is another kind of love, one which wants to build up instead of destroy."

Yvonne sighed. Unconsciously he had voiced something of which she thought she was subconsciously aware. It seemed as though she were predestined to stir men's passions and not their love. Some wicked strain in her, she thought, the result of her birth, the result of having an unknown mother. And here was this man on whose love she set such store telling her that it *was* only passion she had stirred, but telling her in a way which struck her dumb. There was no contempt in his voice, no bitter reviling, just the plain statement, it seemed to her, that she appealed to all that was bad in his nature. This man, the only man who had ever stirred the real woman in her, was, unknown to himself, hitting her harder blows than he had ever struck in all the fierceness of his temper, and before she realised it or could help herself the tears sprang to her eyes.

"Oh, Yvonne, what have I said," he exclaimed with remorse. "I wouldn't hurt you for worlds! I love you, I've always loved you, you know it's the truth." He put out his hand and took hers, looking at her pleadingly. "I know we can't marry, I know it only too well, but if you love me I'll marry no one else. I'll live just for your love

and that alone, and my life will be as unselfish as your own. All I ask, dear, is one kiss, a kiss which will blot out the memory of those others, a kiss to cherish through life."

A smile shone through her tears. The inclination to kiss him was great, it was expressed in her eyes and, putting his arm round her, he drew her slowly towards him.

The kiss which would have sealed the bond had almost been exchanged, and, had it been, the deep love which they bore each other would have risen pure and triumphant above all obstacles, but for one second he hesitated, his mind flew back to those other kisses and the result. His hesitation was fatal, for, as he waited, she seemed to hear once more his cry that he wanted a love which would build and not destroy, and without a word she disengaged herself from his encircling arm.

"No, it would never do," she said quietly. "In the first place you're not free to talk to me like that. I know you're engaged to Miss Ryder. Unconsciously you have admitted that the attraction I have for you is one that appeals to your lower senses. You have made it clear that you yearn for a love which will build and not destroy, and you were thinking of the love you have for Muriel Ryder when you spoke like that."

"No, Yvonne . . . "

She put out her hand to stay the interruption. "Let me finish, please. Aunt Eloise told me that you had promised your mother to marry soon. Do you think I would be a party to your breaking that promise knowing that you can't marry me? You have already told your mother of your engagement, and do you think I would let a love which, on your own confession is a sordid thing, come between you and your mother? . . . I should never forgive myself! And do you think that even if I did love you—and I don't!—I would let my love come between you and your ambitions? You can never marry me, I could never break down the bonds which hold me. Forget me, Mr. Barrington, as I shall forget you."

She knew, even as she spoke, that she would never forget him, but this horrid thing on which his love was founded should be destroyed for ever.

“Your first impression of me was the right one . . . I have no heart, no soul. I am incapable of inspiring a love such as you desire. I am that odious thing you called me, soulless, heartless, just stirring men’s passions and trampling all their finer feelings in the dust. Have you not had proof of it on two occasions? Have I not used all my attractions to tempt you and then, when I have taunted you beyond your powers of endurance, have I not delighted in telling you that you are no more to me than other men? And I have done it just to satisfy . . . my vanity! Fate decreed, from the moment we met, that we should hate one another, and now I tell you to your face that I *do* hate you. I hate you more than any man I have ever met because, if you want to know, you make the same appeal to me as I make to you. And do you think I loathe you less than you loathe me because you make no appeal to my real love? . . . I, too, want a love which will build and not destroy. And I tell you now if you had appealed to other emotions—no, I’m not ashamed to admit that I’m not all I should be!—I would have loved you and sought you from the nethermost ends of the world, even if I had to break the most sacred vows that ever woman took! Now do you understand? Do you understand that a woman can have passion and yet be pure?”

“No, I don’t understand,” said Cleeve vehemently. “You’re the one thing or the other, not both! And that you are the odious thing you make out, I don’t believe! No, nor did I believe it when in my temper the other day I said you were. I was mad, mad to talk to you like that!” But even as he spoke the grating sounds of the brakes slowing down the train warned him that the journey was nearing its end.

Oh, how Yvonne wanted to tell him that he had spoken the truth. How she would have liked to tell him that her love had goaded her to act as she acted, and if there had been no Muriel things would have been so different. How she wanted to tell him that her love for him was so great that she would willingly sacrifice all for him. Disgrace? What did disgrace matter where love was concerned? . . . Then she remembered his political ambitions, seemed to

hear once more his cry, "I feel there is another kind of love—one that wants to build and not destroy."

That love was hers and it would not destroy. Looking at him with unwavering eyes she continued in a firm, controlled voice:

"I've spoken the truth, Mr. Barrington, and when you are alone and reflect on the emotions you have experienced from my presence you will realise your mistake. No man can help himself when a woman who attracts him is determined he shall fall; and when you are alone and think of what you've told me you will loathe yourself for letting your infatuation once more temporarily obliterate the love which Muriel Ryder has a right to claim."

The train stopped, and while he searched his mind for a reply to her bewildering, fantastic arguments, she opened the carriage door and slipped out.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was late in the afternoon when Cleeve Barrington commenced his return journey, and except for the few minutes spent in the taxi on the way to the Courtneys' house in Berkeley Square he had had little time for reflection.

In the first place he had no sooner been admitted than Mrs. Courtney button-holed him for a *tête-à-tête* conversation and, woman-like, she had interlarded leading but subtle questions, calculated to ascertain how Mrs. de Haviland's scheme progressed, with details of her husband's indisposition and the business on which Cleeve had been called. Then came lunch and afterwards a long interview with the patient, whom he found in a very depressed mood, so depressed that Cleeve had not the heart to refuse the old man's request to act as executor to his will. It was a responsibility Cleeve did not welcome, for Mr. Courtney referred to many unsound concerns in which he had been persuaded to invest considerable sums of money, and Cleeve had little difficulty in realising that the glowing accounts of the professional company promoter and the promise of lucrative seats on various Boards had lured him into unsound speculations. As the recital continued the precarious nature of Mr. Courtney's financial position became apparent. His anxiety of mind to conceal from his wife the real state of affairs was pathetic. His pleas that Cleeve could not make a worse mess of things, and that his other friends were either more or less in the same boat or too advanced in years to undertake the task successfully, were irresistible. And so in the end, Cleeve fell in with the suggestion, accepted his responsibilities, and, refusing even Mrs. Courtney's pressing invitation to stay the night, commenced as soon as he could his return journey home.

He wanted to be alone and his luck was in, for as the

train steamed out of the station he found himself the sole occupant of a first class carriage and, leaning back with a sigh of relief, he gave himself up to thought. At first his thoughts concentrated on Mr. Courtney's indisposition, which appeared to be more mental than physical; on the position in which Mrs. Courtney would find herself should anything serious happen. Other thoughts, more personal, were whispering to him, but for a time he was successful in keeping them in the background. He forced himself to speculate on the possibility of persuading Mr. Courtney, even at that late hour, to cut his losses, retrieve what he could and, under proper advice, put the savings of the wreck into sound investments; on the possibility of effecting retrenchments in every way before fate called on Mrs. Courtney to face the inevitable, on the tact which would be necessary to induce Mr. Courtney to dispose of his expensive town house and seek residence in a less expensive neighbourhood.

Cleeve pondered over all these things. He considered if he accepted the post of executor that it was his duty to see there was an estate to administer, and, for Mrs. Courtney's sake, he was determined to waste no time in influencing Mr. Courtney to take immediate steps to conserve what still remained and economise in every possible way.

But in spite of the seriousness of all these issues, those other thoughts kept whispering and gradually interest in the Courtneys' affairs was overshadowed by his own. He felt fate had played him what he called a scurvy trick, but deep down in his heart he knew he had played it on himself. Yvonne's emphatic rejection of his advances had only served for the time being to introduce the magnifying glass of self-analysis through which he saw a more despicable self than he had ever seen before. As time passed his thoughts grew complex and disjointed and, filled with an overwhelming sense of self-contempt, he spoke them to himself.

"What on earth made me go and propose again? . . . Like a silly moth round a candle!"

Then followed a few hazy half-formed thoughts . . . "Damned fool! Vacillating idiot!" After which followed more half-formed thoughts . . . "Don't know my own mind

for two minutes together. Sickening! Sickening! No one but a devil's cur would propose to one girl and then run after another. . . . And a married woman at that!" Good God! was there any limit to the depth he could fall?

Followed a few minutes' silence, during which more muddled thoughts stampeded through his brain. . . . "Love! I spoke about love?" He gave a scornful laugh. "Love! . . . Why I don't possess such a thing, What I possess would disgrace the instincts of a dog!" He rose from his seat and stood erect for a moment. "Smiled superciliously—didn't I?—when Mrs. de Haviland said I was little more than a boy." At this thought he clenched his teeth, a snarling expression parted his lips, while he gave a heavy self-inflicted slap on his thigh which made him wince. "Boy? . . . I'm not even that, and there's poor old Courtney treating me like a man and I've all those airy notions about pulling him straight when I *can't* go straight myself!"

He reseated himself. "And Muriel trusts me; said she'd always loved me and that I'd always been her hero! . . . Hero? My God! What a *hero* for any woman to love! . . . Make promises as sacred as marriage vows and . . . Well, no one could loathe me more than I loathe myself. It's something to know my own weakness. Fact is, I don't know what I do want; it wouldn't surprise me now if, when I marry Muriel, I left her at the church door and chivied a broomstick with a petticoat on it!"

The latter thought brought a smile to his face, and the smile somehow tempered his self-loathing.

He gazed absently out of the window and a quieter mood followed as the train rushed on past cornfields swaying in the breeze, reflecting tints which vied with the golden and deep red glow of the evening sky, on, past silent streams which seemed to hold and retain the tranquillity of an autumn evening. Cleeve Barrington envied that tranquillity. What a peaceful world it was outside men's busy, bursting thoughts. How vain men's ambitions, how vain the cares which rack their minds! The world seemed made for peace, and yet as he reflected on his own position the incongruity of it all struck him. But strive as he would he could not put his own troubles out of mind.

Here he was, in love with Yvonne, worshipping the very ground she trod, worshipping one who, judged by her own words and actions, was a soulless, heartless vampire. It was well fate had intervened! He saw the hand of fate in everything. It had given him a long lease of freedom, and only when he was making a fool of himself had it enmeshed him in its inexorable net. His mother's illness had tightened the cords, and then, as if to show him that there was no escape, it had exposed a side of Yvonne's character which had shattered the dream his mind had previously conjured.

Yes, fate had stepped into his life at an opportune moment to show him that his dream would never become a reality, to prove to him that an ideal face could shelter a character as repulsive as the face was attractive. It had allowed the possessor to play on his feelings, to stir his masculinity to its depths, and then, when he could not believe that such beauty could house so repulsive a soul, it had thrust them together in the train and forced a cold, dispassionate statement of wanton sacrilege from the only lips that had ever really appealed to him, a statement which had utterly destroyed every ideal of his heart.

She said she could love! And almost in the same breath prided herself on her power to stir the devil in him. Yes, it wanted this stroke of fate to convince him that he had done right in proposing to Muriel.

He looked out at the scene again. Tranquillity and peace! Yes, he could have both if he didn't loathe himself so much. What if Yvonne had given him what she called her love? What if she had hidden from him her wanton mind? . . . Would he have gone back to Muriel and broken the engagement, giving up the substance for the shadow of love? . . . Oh, how he loathed Yvonne now, but he loathed himself fifty times more. What low strain in him made him do these despicable things? . . . Well, he couldn't help his nature but he could banish the thought of Yvonne from his mind and he would do it! He would begin afresh with Muriel and leave no stone unturned to make himself worthy of the real love and trust he had obtained.

BOOK II
AT BECCLESFIELD

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN Yvonne arrived home a tall, aristocratic figure came forward to give her a warm and affectionate welcome.

"Oh, Yvonne, my dear, I'm so glad you've returned. You don't know how I've missed you. But your telegram was a surprise! What's happened?"

"Nothing, daddy dear," Yvonne replied with a want of enthusiasm quite foreign to her usual mode of greeting her father, and the change struck him at once; to him her voice sounded dull and lifeless.

"Yvonne, something *has* happened, I know! You're not like my bright, happy little girl." He took her face between his hands and gazed earnestly into her eyes and was struck by the change; the light had gone from them.

"Something has happened, Yvonne! I promised your aunt that you should stay a fortnight and after an absence of a few days you send me a telegram asking me to recall you by wire. The light has gone from your eyes, your voice has changed . . . and . . . and now you're back you don't seem to be quite pleased. It's a very different homecoming from what I expected."

Yvonne sighed. She had left Cleeve Barrington with the light laugh of one who seemed to rejoice in a victory over the opposite sex, regardless of how deeply wounded was the heart she toyed with, but the laugh had died quickly as she continued her journey alone. It had been hard to give up the man she loved, but infinitely harder to give him up in a way which she felt sure would drive him back again, and for ever, into the arms of Muriel Ryder.

Mr. du Barry had spoken the truth, the light had gone from her eyes, just as hope had left her soul. She had driven love from her heart, and the task of driving was

none the less hard because she had driven it away almost before it had found its home.

Yet in spite of the despondency which had settled round her she cherished the thought that she had not made her sacrifice in vain. The words of Cleeve Barrington still rang in her ears: "I have already told you that I love you; but I want to tell you that it is the kind of love which drives me mad." . . . Oh, how true his words were, so true of her own love, so true that the very thought of its power frightened her. A power which seemed to overwhelm every moral instinct, so great that it would have taken very little persuasion on his part for her to give it rein. How near she had been to giving it rein only she herself knew, for she had made up her mind—when waiting for that kiss, the kiss which never came—to break the bonds which held her, made up her mind to tell her father that she could not go on with the pact, to tell him she was young and wanted her freedom like other girls, and to demand her release from the solemn promises she had made.

She had given Cleeve Barrington his chance, more than his chance. . . . "I can love, Mr. Barrington, and when the right man comes along I shall love him, and no vow I've ever taken will prevent me." How his reply: "Isn't that rather a hopeless kind of love?" had hurt her! It had shown her, in spite of all he had said to the contrary, that the love he had confessed was the hopeful kind of love, and because she loved so deeply and so truly she had sent him back to Muriel, had spoken in a way which she knew would change every vestige of affection he had for her to loathing, and she had done this because she placed his happiness before her own.

There was no pettiness about Yvonne's love, not in things that mattered. But the struggle had changed her from a girl to a woman, and now, in the presence of her father, she felt the time had come to challenge her fetters.

"Yes, something has happened," she said deliberately. "But I'm rather tired, daddy dear, we'll have tea first and then I'll tell you."

The cloud of anxiety which had settled on Mr. du Barry's brow deepened as she drew off her gloves and crossed the

room to ring the bell. . . . There was no wedding ring on her finger.

Even the most casual observer would have seen that father and daughter thoroughly understood and, what was more, thoroughly respected one another, for in spite of Mr. du Barry's anxious mien he refrained from pressing his questions and, seating himself in the armchair he had been occupying when Yvonne entered, he resigned himself to the inevitable delay.

"How is your aunt?" he said, changing the subject.

The door opened and a manservant entered noiselessly.

"Jenner, will you bring in tea?" Yvonne said, speaking in French, then turning to her father, she added: "I'm sorry, daddy, I didn't catch what you said," and after a moment's pause added apologetically: "I've got a headache."

"I only asked how you found your aunt. . . . But my questions can wait. Shall I get you an aspirin?"

"No, thank you. I'll be all right as soon as I've had tea. . . . Aunt Eloise was just sweet, she always is."

"How is she looking, Yvonne?"

"I think she's looking a little older, daddy. I don't know why it is, but I somehow thought this time that she has some trouble on her mind."

"Tut, tut! Nothing of the kind! You'll be telling me next that she's in love."

Yvonne poured out a cup of tea before replying, handed it to her father and then, filling a cup for herself, began to sip the hot tea slowly.

"That's just what I am going to tell you. I thought it when she was in Switzerland last year, and I'm sure of it now."

Mr. du Barry gave her a searching look, a look not altogether free from apprehension, but Yvonne was too intent on drinking her tea to notice it. Then he made a sudden movement as though to throw off unwelcome thoughts and laughed with apparent unconcern as he said: "Whatever makes you think that?"

"I don't think it, I'm sure of it," said Yvonne confidently. "I know she never loved her husband, you've often told me so, and Mrs. Courtney told me she was in

love with someone else when she married. Besides, you can see it in her manner, she's always wanting to make things brighter and happier for others. She even solicited my aid as a foil to bring Cleeve Barrington and Muriel Ryder together."

Mr. du Barry looked up with an expression of interest in his eyes, eyes which were remarkably like his daughter's, only not such a deep colour.

"Cleeve Barrington and Muriel Ryder! Are they engaged?"

"Well, I don't know that it's official yet; Aunt Eloise only told me last evening, but she didn't look at all pleased. I think when people are in love they are like that. They want to help others, but when the thing for which they are working is accomplished, they have a little pang of regret that the happiness which falls to others is denied them. I'm sure Aunt Eloise is in love, she's so sympathetic. And when she thinks no one is looking she has her dreams. For if you look into her eyes, which are so soft and caressing in those moments, you somehow feel your thoughts are carried far away with hers to the land she dreams of."

While Yvonne spoke Mr. du Barry kept stirring his tea mechanically and when she finished he was apparently very much engrossed in the task of chasing a tea-leaf with his spoon. Yvonne looked at him curiously for a few seconds. . . . That tea-leaf was very elusive!

"Shall I get it out for you?"

"No, my dear, it's gone now," he said, but he did not lift his gaze from the cup as he added: "How is the headache, Yvonne?"

"It's almost gone. . . . Daddy, you wanted to know why I sent you that telegram?"

Mr. du Barry looked up quickly, there was a strange, questioning look in his eyes.

"Because I'm in love with Cleeve Barrington myself." She was looking steadfastly at her father as she spoke. His hand began to shake as though with a palsy and suddenly the cup he was holding slipped from its saucer and fell with a crash to the oak floor.

"Good God! Yvonne, you don't know what you're

saying! You must be mad! How can you love? You've no right to love!"

Yvonne rose quietly and rang the bell. "Jenner," she said as the man appeared, "bring another cup for Mr. du Barry. And will you wipe the floor, we've had an accident."

As soon as they were alone Yvonne began speaking again.

"I don't think you have anything to fear, daddy, I've already told you that he is engaged to Muriel Ryder. But I'm going to return you the wedding ring, I'm not going to pretend I'm married any more."

"Yvonne, you must not speak to me like that," said her father sharply. "There's no going back on the promises you made. When you made them I took you completely into my confidence, I explained my exact position, I made everything as clear as I could. I told you that if ever you became engaged it would open out a terrible scandal. For myself I don't care, my thoughts are for somebody far dearer to me. If it is true that you love Cleeve Barrington, then you know that there is no sacrifice you would not make to protect his good name. And it is just as necessary for me to protect the name of the woman I love."

"That's just it, daddy. I've only your word to go on."

"You have only my word to go on," Mr. du Barry repeated the words incredulously, as though he could hardly believe his ears. "What do you mean? Isn't my word enough? Oh, I never thought you would doubt me like that, Yvonne," he added sorrowfully.

"I don't doubt you, dear," Yvonne said gently. "I know everything you say is true. But can't you see that you haven't been frank with me? I don't know what scandal I'm protecting. . . . Whether it concerns only that lady, or you as well, or if it may not somehow concern me. I know you're my father, but I don't know who my mother is, you'll never tell me. All I have to go on is what my old nurse said . . . that she thought she was a French lady. When I asked you if it were true you said

you couldn't tell me, but you didn't deny it, daddy. And don't you see that the promise I gave you can't last? . . . I was young when I gave it, too young to understand, and I want you to realise that that promise has wrecked my life. I could have married Cleeve Barrington, for he proposed to me. It was that silly promise I made that put me in a false position. But I shan't do anything that you need be afraid of; although I can't see why my marriage should bring any scandal to light. You gave me the alternatives of promising not to marry and wearing a wedding ring, or the convent. I have loved now and learnt . . . many things. I love Cleeve as I could never love anyone else, and for your sake I've sent him into the arms of another. If I can renounce the ties of love, I can renounce the ties of parentage. As long as I only loved you, the yoke you placed upon me was a light one, but now it's a cross I can't carry in a free world, the only place I can carry it is in the shelter of a convent where there will be others, who carry similar crosses, to help me. Daddy, can't you understand? . . . There is a higher love than the love of man, and I must attain it now or lose my soul."

"Yvonne, you can't mean this, you can't!" Mr. du Barry's face suddenly looked white and lined, and there was a stricken, helpless look in his eyes. "I'm getting on in years, my child. I bear a grief the intensity of which not even you can guess, and would you leave me, an old man, all alone in this big house? You can't realise to what you are condemning me. There would be no Yvonne to ease my burden; my waking hours would be as hopeless as the long hours of the night when your smiles and laughter are taken from me, those long hours when I lie awake praying for the dawn again, and you. You wouldn't take my few happy hours from me, Yvonne, would you?"

Yvonne looked at her father, and for the first time saw tears in his eyes, she saw the change in him, the signs of age creeping over him, and suddenly she realised that her father who had always sheltered her and appeared so strong and self-reliant was nothing more than a helpless child pleading for her care.

She crossed over to the mantelpiece, picked up her hand-

bag, and, opening it, took out her wedding ring and slowly replaced it on her finger. She crossed over to her father, put her arms round his neck and looked deep into his eyes, which were raised to hers with a pleading expression in their depths.

“No, daddy, I couldn’t,” she answered sadly. “As long as I can help you to be happy I’ll stay.”

CHAPTER XX

“NOT bad sport, Cleeve, was it?”

It was the Rev. Mr. Ryder who was speaking, and his round, red face beamed with contentment as he made the remark.

“Not at all, sir.”

“Let me see, how many pheasants did we get? . . . Forty-five, and eight hares. I call this an ideal little shoot and wonderfully cheap.”

“I think, dear,” said Mrs. Ryder reprovingly, “that Cleeve would like to have a little talk with Muriel, wouldn’t you, Cleeve?”

Cleeve looked at the speaker and murmured a vague reply.

Mrs. Ryder smiled indulgently. “Well, Cleeve, I’m sure you’d like a little chat with Muriel before you go to bed, wouldn’t you? There’s a nice fire in the study and it would be a pity to waste it. But don’t hold hands *too* long, children!” she concluded archly.

Muriel rose and walked quickly towards the door and then, wondering why Cleeve was not following, looked back at him invitingly.

He got up slowly, and moving aside with his foot the footstool it had been resting on, he sauntered after her.

“I think Cleeve wanted to sit and talk a bit,” observed Mr. Ryder, when they had departed. “Half the fun of sport is talking about it after dinner.”

“Now, Charles, don’t be selfish!” said his wife, “Remember, dear, you were young yourself once. If it’s fine to-morrow we’ll join you at lunch and Cleeve and Muriel can have a little picnic to themselves, then to-morrow night you can have a longer chat with Cleeve.”

* * * * *

As Cleeve passed through the study door he stood for a

moment watching Muriel as she settled herself comfortably at one end of the chesterfield.

"Come and sit here, Cleeve," she invited, patting a cushion into place.

Cleeve crossed over to the chesterfield and sat down reluctantly. He didn't feel like having "a little chat with Muriel" that night. Besides, she looked so sure of herself and him. But as he sat down she nestled close and, putting her arms round his neck, kissed him softly on the cheek.

"Oh, Cleeve, I do so love you," she murmured. "I know I don't deserve you and sometimes I think you don't love me, not as I love you."

"Of course I do, Muriel. Why do you say such a thing?"

"Well, you never kiss me unless I ask you, and you didn't seem at all eager to come here. I thought you were never going to get out of that chair. And then, Cleeve, I can't forget that look on your face when you were dancing with Yvonne."

Cleeve moved away with an irritable shrug of his shoulders. "Why do you always bring that up? I've told you it's finished; I've told you I wouldn't marry her if there wasn't another woman in the world."

"But I can't forget it," Muriel said miserably. "And I want to make sure of our love. It would be a terrible thing if we were to marry and then discover we didn't really love one another."

Cleeve made no reply.

"Is Yvonne the only girl you've kissed?" Muriel asked presently.

"Good Lord, no!" He gave an amused chuckle.

Muriel looked at him with dismay. "But you won't kiss another girl now you're engaged to me, will you, Cleeve?"

"My dear Muriel, I can't tell. It's a habit of mine and habits are hard to break," said Cleeve laughingly.

"Do you really mean me to believe that it is a habit of yours to kiss anyone who . . . who wants you to kiss her?" She could understand anyone wanting to kiss him, and felt a little pang of jealousy.

"Not exactly, Muriel. I only kiss girls who don't want to kiss me; there's no fun in it if the girl wants to kiss.

The more she hates kisses the more I enjoy the kissing. And, of course, she must be pretty; that is why pretty faces are made, they're absolutely essential to kisses!"

"Cleeve, I don't think you can love me when you talk like that!" said Muriel sharply.

"Good Lord, Muriel, I was only chaffing you, love has nothing to do with kisses! A pretty girl expects to be kissed, doesn't she?"

"I don't expect to be kissed and you say I am pretty!" She regarded him frowningly for a moment and then, continuing in a reproachful voice, said: "Why do you always say 'Good Lord'? It hurts me a little when I hear you."

"Good Lord, Muriel, I didn't think you were as sensitive as that! . . . It's another habit of mine. I'm afraid I'm so full of habits that I'd be quite lonely without them."

"If you really loved me," said Muriel gently, "it wouldn't be hard to give them up. I'd do anything for you, Cleeve."

"You know I love you, Muriel, but I'm tired. I wonder why you girls all believe in that silly love business you read about in modern novels? . . . The all-consuming fire and that sort of rubbish! That kind of love is nearly all hate if you ask me!"

"Cleeve, I'm sorry." Muriel looked at him repentantly. "I didn't know you were tired, we won't argue any more. Come closer and put your head on my shoulder and we'll talk about nice things for a while."

CHAPTER XXI

“I ’M afraid, Mr. Barrington, we won’t be able to shoot to-morrow.”

“I thought you said we were to beat the cow lezzer copse to-morrow? I was looking forward to it,” said Cleeve in a regretful tone.

“I’m sorry to disappoint you, Mr. Barrington,” the keeper replied, “but Mr. Wharton is shooting to-day in the fields the other side, so it wouldn’t do to go there to-morrow. It’s the best cover we’ve got, and I don’t want it to disappoint you when we do shoot it. I’d also forgotten it’s market day to-morrow, and it would be difficult to get our reg’lar beaters. We couldn’t ’ave John Molyneux anyway, and ’e’s the only man who knows this shooting well enough to manage the beating.”

Cleeve laughed. “My double, I suppose you mean!”

Walker lowered his eyes and his face flushed a little. He was wondering whether Mr. Barrington could by any chance have overheard the conversation he had had the previous night with Tom Morris, the under-keeper.

Walker and Morris, at the time, were walking back together after the day’s sport was over, and had commented on the rather striking resemblance between the two in front of them, Cleeve Barrington and John Molyneux. In the course of their conversation Walker had said rather emphatically—for in spite of his calling he had socialistic inclinations—“It proves my theory, Tom, that there’s nothing in breeding; Jack’s as good as his master if you only h’educate ’im and give ’im brass.” Walker’s manner of speaking differed. To his superiors he was very careful to avoid ultra colloquialisms, to his equals and those beneath him he spoke without restraint, but at all times he exhibited an occasional unsteadiness on his aitches. Now in the light of Cleeve’s remarks Walker pondered. Was that

remark, "My double, I suppose you mean," a dig at him, because he'd not made sufficient allowances for Barrington's quick ear? Or did it spring from a spontaneous thought, the outcome of a recognition of what was perfectly obvious? It was Cleeve who supplied the answer to these mental questions.

"He's changed his name lately, even though he hasn't the brass, eh, Walker?"

The keeper's face flushed a deeper pink. "W—what do you mean, Mr. Barrington?" he stammered in an endeavour to gain time to compose himself,—for it was no part of Walker's socialistic creed to offend those who had "brass."

"I thought you called him John Barrington nowadays," said Cleeve mercilessly.

Walker moistened his lips and glanced at Barrington as he replied self-deprecatingly: "We didn't mean no offence, Mr. Barrington, but 'e's so like you we do call him John Barrington at times."

Cleeve, with an amused chuckle, turned the conversation.

"So we can't shoot to-morrow. Well, I suppose we'll have to take a day off and I might have a look round this quaint old town. I'd rather like to see what it looks like on market day."

Walker responded eagerly and, anxious to keep the conversation going in a safe direction, expatiated at great length on the attractions of Becclesfield on market day.

"They're mostly small farmers about 'ere and they come in scores to sell their pigs and cattle, and the farmers' wives their heggs, fowls and ducks. You've never seen so many people in a small town in your life; you'd wonder where they hall come from. And men like John Molyneux earn a tidy sum acting as 'erd drivers or as porters, collecting parcels from the shops and putting 'em in the owners' traps, which are packed so closely together in the bait stables that you can't get one out without moving a score of others."

Cleeve's eyes twinkled as he pictured the scene. "And I suppose many a parcel is put into the wrong trap and then rows begin?"

"That's very rare, Mr. Barrington. You see h'everybody's known round 'ere and the make and shape of their

conveyances. There's quarrelling of course, but it's not over parcels."

"No, I suppose the quarrelling's over the price of pigs?"

"No, sir, there's not over much of that neither. The quarrelling comes when the wives try to get their 'usbands out of the bar parlours, and they don't 'arf do it sometimes."

Then as Walker called to mind some of the scenes he had witnessed he chuckled broadly with the zest of mirth.

"I suppose they find they can't sell pigs without pints, Walker?"

"Seemingly not, sir! 'Pears to me they forget they've got wives, some of 'em, when they've pigs and cows to sell and beer to drink, and wives, of course, get a bit anxious as night comes."

"Anxious to get them home before too much money's gone, eh?"

"Yes, and before they're too merry to drive straight. It makes me laugh sometimes to see the way these farmers drive to market and the way they drive 'ome."

"I suppose there's a good deal of difference?"

"I should say there is, Mr. Barrington," replied Walker emphatically. "They drive in dressed up in their best clothes as though they were going to church, with their 'eads in the air and looking as hindependent as only farmers can. You see, being a Londoner I suppose I notice these things," he explained. "Their wives sitting aside of 'em, looking as important as 'ens with chicks! But when they drive 'ome at night! . . . It's a treat sometimes to watch 'em. Reins dangling on their 'orses' backs, 'ands carelessly dropped between their knees, 'eads almost rolling on their chests, 'umming snatches of songs and 'ymns, and their wives waiting a chance to take the reins."

"And I suppose they've all got their favourite ditty, eh?"

"Some of 'em 'ave, Mr. Barrington," Walker assented. "But it's mostly 'ymns they sing, and 'Through all the changing scenes of life' seems to be a partic'lar favourite."

Cleeve roared. The description was not new to him; it was the description of every market town on market day, even his own. But having grown up amid those scenes he had never seen anything extraordinary in them, and he

wondered why Walker was so amused and interested until he recollected that the keeper had been born and bred in London.

"You don't know Becclesfield," said Walker, interrupting Cleeve's thoughts. "Do you, Mr. Barrington?"

"No, I've never been here before."

"It's a fine old place," said Walker enthusiastically. "The church is well worth seeing, and in the market place there's still the old stocks. Then there's the 'ouses of the preacher and reader, hever so old! . . . I tell you what, Mr. Barrington, if you've nothing else to do to-morrow, why not let me show you the place? . . . I'd like to very much."

Cleeve had made that previous remark about wishing to look round the quaint old town, with no really fixed purpose or inclination.

Walker had been so obviously embarrassed at the reference to Molyneux that Cleeve had welcomed the change in the conversation as much as Walker had welcomed it, and his expressed desire was little more than a subterfuge. But the one thing he wished to avoid was a day alone with Muriel, and, in the absence of some definite programme, he felt convinced that Mrs. Ryder would contrive to throw them together.

He had slept very little during the night. His feelings for Muriel, or rather the absence of them, had given his thoughts too much food for sleep; and the thought of a whole day with her after a night of indecision appalled him. It was during the nights he wavered; it was then that Yvonne's love seemed to become a reality, seemed to creep so closely to him that its strong compelling whispers could not be denied. It was at night his own love for her was recreated, and with his senses dulled, as a result of the fatigue of the day, the romance of his desires rendered impotent those finer instincts in which honour beds its roots. But his senses were not so doped as to rob him of the pricks of conscience. Muriel's love was a greater and more tangible reality. It, too, pleaded and whispered; and it pleaded with such force that the source of the reality of that other love was concealed. Under its influence he imagined his belief in the existence of Yvonne's love sprang

partly from his own wishes and desires and partly from reflex thoughts stimulated by the revulsion which Muriel's demand for a demonstrative affection, the equal of her own, produced. But the one thing which emerged, clear and definite, from the chaos of these nocturnal reflections was the knowledge that he did not love Muriel Ryder. And in the light of that knowledge he felt a whole day with her would deprive him of the strength of mind necessary to steel his purpose.

It was therefore with no small degree of relief that he finally made up his mind to accept Walker's offer, consoling himself for this dereliction of duty to Muriel with the thought that it would give him time to reset his course. He would go for a long walk in the morning and meet Walker in the afternoon. He would have no more of those nightly struggles with love and duty. It was not fair to Muriel.

The daytime was the time to decide and a long healthy walk would restore his brain, for his head was more to be trusted than his heart. It was that silly heart of his which kept pleading for one who was not deserving of any man's consideration. That silly heart of his which gained the ascendancy at night and bade him hope and love. But in the daytime his brain awoke and then he remembered that there were other things to be considered and that honour and duty too had their claims. It might be true that he had been rather more than hasty over this engagement—but it was all his own doing and his daytime thoughts were prompting him to make up his mind to see it through.

CHAPTER XXII

THE next afternoon the clock in the belfry was chiming three as Cleeve Barrington entered the western gate of the churchyard accompanied by Walker. He wore an old shooting jacket and a tweed cap. His boots, leggings and breeches were mud splashed, for he had been a long cross-country walk and, not knowing the country, had landed himself on one or two occasions in soft patches which would have turned a less agile or determined man. But Cleeve was out to settle his plans, and the thought of making a detour never entered his head. He had just walked straight on as his fancy drove him, jumping when necessary, and, where the ground was too soft, skipping lightly from tuft to tuft till he had negotiated those quaggy obstacles. He had consequently spent much energy during that walk; and as the earlier part of the afternoon had been sultry and oppressive he was both tired and hot, as his face and neck bore witness.

"It's getting chilly, Mr. Barrington, and looks like frost; you'll be catching cold after a walk like you've 'ad."

"I don't think I shall, Walker. Colds don't trouble me much."

"Maybe not, but you're not used to these parts and it's never safe to go without a muffler at this time of the year. I'd turn me collar up if I was you; you'll find the church pretty cold."

Cleeve did find it cold, but soon forgot his sense of discomfort in the interest the place evoked. There are few older churches than that of Becclesfield; part of it was built in the Norman times, the belfry holds one of the finest peals in the east of England, and the stained glass windows in the chancel are of priceless fifteenth century glass. But what perhaps interested Cleeve as much as anything were the quaint epitaphs on some of the old tablets. One in

particular was too enigmatical for any mortal to solve. The tablet announced that it had been erected to the memory of a departed gentleman on whom had fallen the duty not only of taxing the local inhabitants for the upkeep of the draining of the surrounding country, but disbursing the proceeds; and after a brief recital of his name, age and titles it went on to state "that the kind of man he was would never be disclosed until the Judgment Day." Cleeve found himself, as the twain retraced their steps, trying to make a short cut to the Judgment Day decision.

Leaving the church they went through the houses of the reader and the preacher, and Cleeve elicited the fact that the appointments still held. They were relics of the old days when Becclesfield was an important religious centre with a rector, preacher and reader appointed by the Crown. The duties of the reader and the preacher had in process of time undergone a change. They no longer simply read and preached, but acted as curates in the widest possible sense, though their appointments were permanent and their duties, in many respects, independent of the rector.

Other relics of bygone prosperity were visited and then in the course of time they sought the market square, but not before they had taken a peep at the various bait stables, and even Cleeve Barrington, used as he was to market days in his own provincial town, was surprised at the number of conveyances parked in the comparatively small spaces which the stable yards possessed. Sauntering along, Cleeve looking to right and left, anxious not to miss anything of interest, they came to a narrow alley-way down which they walked and finally found themselves in the market square. It was now getting late in the afternoon and a fair amount of horseplay was apparently being indulged in. Suddenly Barrington's thoughts were interrupted by a laugh from his companion accompanied by an excited ejaculation.

"They've managed it at last!" he cried, and Cleeve, looking in the direction in which Walker's finger was pointing, saw a surging crowd in the centre of the square. "We mustn't miss this," added Walker, hurrying forward, and Cleeve followed.

In the small space in the centre of that crowd were the stocks, which were at that particular moment occupied by

a little fat man, wearing a complacent smile on his full, ruddy face, sitting unconcernedly on a cold stone with his legs and arms firmly imprisoned by the heavy beams. On one side stood an attendant fanning him with a cabbage leaf, on the other side was another attendant holding a glass and a large jug of foaming ale. In front of the prisoner stood a pseudo-town crier, bell in one hand and an important looking document in the other. Three times the crier rang the bell and after each peal he shouted "Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!" Then holding up the document he commenced to read in a stentorian voice:

"Farmer Onions: You have been tried by a jury of your compeers at the bar of the 'Rose and Crown' for the most heinous crime in Christendom, to wit, that you have with malice aforethought made a practice of standing drinks at the said bar, and have steadfastly refused to allow anyone to stand you a drink in return. Beer have you refused, whiskey have you spurned, gin you wot not of, unless the same has been purchased with your own filthy lucre, of which you have admitted you possess an abundant store. To possess an abundance of anything which is filthy is the serious offence to which you have pleaded 'not guilty.' The members and benchers of the bar of the 'Rose and Crown' know nothing of the meaning of such a plea, and—after hearing the little you had to say in self-defence, the much abuse which, unfortunately, you gratuitously handed round with the same freedom as you hand round drinks—they, the afore-said members and benchers, have decreed that you be placed in the stocks and kept there until you have swallowed one quart of October ale subscribed for by those who have been the victims of your unchristian-like generosity. . . ."

What the town crier had further to recite and what eventually happened to the ale Cleeve never discovered, for a light tap on his shoulder arrested him.

"I've been waiting for you for some time," he heard a feminine voice say. "But of course you forget all about that when there's any beer drinking going on, don't you?"

He thought his ears were deceiving him, but turning suddenly his eyes corroborated the testimony of their col-

leagues. He saw the retreating figure of Yvonne wending her way out of the crowd.

"I've been waiting for you." . . . Was he dreaming? He turned the sentence over in his mind. He had not heard a word either from or about her since she had stepped out of that train. "Been waiting for me? How did she get here or know I was in Becclesfield?" These thoughts flashed through his mind and, to add to the confusion of his intellect, the beer reference intruded and introduced further puzzles. He was not aware that there was to be any beer drinking until he was right on the top of it. "Waiting for me! Who on earth made the appointment?"

. . . .
These thoughts took but a fraction of a second to flash on the screen of his mind when suddenly the flashing ceased and his attention was diverted by a hearty, good-natured laugh from Walker.

"Well, you can excuse us now, Mr. Barrington, can't you?"

Cleeve became more baffled. Was there some mystery about her presence in which Walker was playing an allotted part?

"For what?" he demanded shortly. There was a puzzled, almost angry frown on his face. His first inclination had been to follow Yvonne, but the element of mystery bade him tarry a moment or two.

"Well, if Mrs. du Barry can mistake you for John Molyneux, you will forgive us for calling him your double?"

"I don't understand you," said Cleeve thoughtfully. He had made up his mind to follow Yvonne, and out of the corner of his eyes he saw her walking steadily on without so much as casting a backward glance to see if he were coming. She had now almost reached the end of the square and, fearful that he might lose sight of her, and without waiting for Walker to give an explanation, he strode quickly forward in her wake. He had passed halfway through the square when Walker overtook him.

"Don't you trouble, Mr. Barrington, I'll go and find 'im; you won't know where to look. I expect 'e'll be at the 'Rose and Crown.' "

"I don't know what you're talking about, Walker," said

Cleeve impatiently. And then anxious to rid himself of Walker's company he added: "I know Mrs. du Barry and I'd forgotten my appointment with her."

It was now Walker's turn to be puzzled. Could he have made a mistake? He reflected a few moments and came to the conclusion that a lady, especially one so young and winsome, would hardly push her way into the centre of a crowd, tap her friend on the back and inform him that beer was a greater attraction than herself. It was much more likely, he thought, that she had mistaken Mr. Barrington for John Molyneux, especially as it was getting dusk and the crush round the stocks made recognition difficult. He had better explain matters quickly, he decided.

"I think there's some mistake 'ere, Mr. Barrington. You see, Mrs. du Barry employes John Molyneux every market day to carry 'er parcels 'ome and 'e usually meets 'er about this time. Still, if you've an appointment with Mrs. du Barry, it's all right, but I think I'll go to the 'Rose and Crown' and see if Molyneux is there, for it looks to me as though a fog's coming on and if 'e keeps Mrs. du Barry waiting much longer she'll 'ave to go all the way by road. The footpath through the fields will be too 'ard to find and none too safe in a fog."

"How long is the road?" asked Cleeve in a conciliating manner, suddenly jumping to the conclusion that Walker's explanation was the correct one and somewhat regretting his previous abruptness.

"It's about four miles, a stiffish walk really when you're laden with parcels."

Cleeve gave a sigh of relief; he hated himself inwardly for the weakness which produced his feeling of satisfaction at the prospect of a walk with Yvonne, but more inwardly he lamented that the walk was not fourteen miles instead of four; for Cleeve Barrington, succumbing to that weakness, had already made up his mind to have that walk with Yvonne at all costs, and the only thing which puzzled him at the moment was how to accomplish it? Yvonne had disappeared! "There's nothing for it," he told himself, "but to accompany Walker to the 'Rose and Crown.'"

"Couldn't we get a trap for Mrs. du Barry? It would save her that long walk."

In putting the question Cleeve was less interested in saving "that long walk" than in the prospect of sitting beside Yvonne and getting rid of Molyneux, but even while he spoke those words a faint whisper caught his ear: "What about Muriel, Cleeve?" He only just heard the whisper which really conveyed nothing at the time, for the small winged figure of a blindfolded cherub fluttered momentarily in his mental vision and, without giving Cleeve further time for thought, put its fingers in his ears.

Walker coughed discreetly. "I'm afraid not, Mr. Barrington, not at this late hour, and you wouldn't get anyone to turn out in a real Norfolk fog, and this looks like being one. Besides, it would waste a deal of time, but apart from keeping Mrs. du Barry waiting I'm afraid Mr. du Barry'd be none too pleased."

"Mr. du Barry wouldn't be pleased?"

"No, he doesn't like any strangers to approach anywhere near the grounds of Mill 'ouse if 'e can 'elp it. The gates are always locked, and even Molyneux 'imself 'asn't never set 'is foot inside."

"Why's that?"

"Well, there's all sorts of rumours. Some say it's because 'e's got a young wife and is jealous of her. Anyway the fact is Mrs. du Barry's pretty closely looked after and she's never seen except on Thursdays when she does 'er shopping. Others say she isn't 'is wife at all, but she's married a lunatic who's locked up in Mill 'ouse. Anyway it's all rumours, nobody knows for certain and nobody's ever got anything out of the servants for all their trying; they're all foreigners of some sort I believe. . . . But perhaps, seeing you know 'er, you'll be laughing at what I'm telling you?"

Cleeve felt curious. He was sorry he told Walker he knew Yvonne, it made it impossible for him to ask too many questions or show any natural curiosity with regard to the family, so he remained silent, and in silence they reached the "Rose and Crown."

Pushing their way through the crowd in the bar, they entered the parlour at the back. Here, dimly through the smoke-laden atmosphere, they beheld John Molyneux standing precariously on unsteady legs and holding a quart

pewter of beer, while he sang in a boisterous voice a ditty which thoroughly expressed his condition at the moment. Cleeve looked at Walker and without exchanging words each sensed the other's thoughts—"that John Molyneux would carry no parcels that night."

With a slight shrug of his shoulders Barrington turned and, retracing his steps, waited outside for Walker to reappear. Later when the keeper emerged Cleeve saw that he wore a worried look.

"I don't know what to do," he said. "I can't get anyone to take Molyneux's place at this late hour, and Mrs. du Barry will be upset. There's nothing for it as far as I can see but to go meself. I can't let a lady be stranded on a night like this."

Cleeve brightened considerably. Walker's remarks had put an idea into his head.

"No, Walker," he answered in a lazy voice which belied the racing of his heartbeats. "You forget I've an appointment with Mrs. du Barry. I can easily manage the parcels; you go home."

"You'd better let me come with you, Mr. Barrington," Walker entreated. "You'd never find the road yourself, and Mrs. du Barry will 'ave so many parcels you'll never be able to carry 'em. . . . You see, Molyneux carries 'em in a sack."

"I can buy a sack," was Cleeve's assurance, given in a voice which plainly expressed his determination to have his way. "If you'll tell me where to find Mrs. du Barry I'll manage all right."

"She'll be at the George Hotel, Mr. Barrington, but . . ."

"Thanks! Good-night, Walker," said Cleeve and, turning away, he broke into a brisk walk and was soon lost to the astonished Walker's gaze. For a while the latter stood with a puzzled look on his face as he sought to find a motive for Barrington's evident desire for a *tête-à-tête* walk with Mrs. du Barry; he didn't believe that story of an appointment.

Approaching the George Hotel, Cleeve espied through the thick gloom of the fog the lights of a general stores shop on the opposite side of the road and, remembering that he would need a sack, he crossed over and purchased

one. Emerging a little later into the street again he hurriedly recrossed the road, making straight for the George, the light over the main entrance of which was now only dimly visible. His pace slackened as he drew near and then suddenly the figure of a woman, walking agitatedly up and down the pavement in front of the hotel, loomed through the fog. He felt his heart beating quickly, he would have known it was Yvonne had the fog been twice as thick. She came to a sudden halt as he stopped a few yards from her.

“Molyneux, you’ve been drinking again.” She made the statement in a stern, though anxious voice. “I wonder you’re not ashamed to come to me at this hour! How do you think I’m going to get home in this fog? It really is too bad.”

The words put an idea into Cleeve’s head. It would be rather fun, he thought, to pretend he was John Molyneux and see what happened. He dropped his head in a shame-faced manner, as he thought the guilty Molyneux would have done, and with a slight hesitation in his steps drew a little nearer.

CHAPTER XXIII

“‘A VEN’T ’ad much,” said Cleeve, imitating the thick speech to which he had heard John Molyneux giving vent.

“Then I’d like to know what you’ve been doing until this hour.”

“ ’Tisn’t very late, an’ I cum as soon as you called me.”

“Oh, it’s not very late, Molyneux? And if you haven’t had much to drink I’d like to know why you can’t speak properly. I can’t let you carry my parcels unless you sober up pretty quickly.”

Cleeve reflected a moment. Perhaps he had been a little too thick in his speech; he’d have to gradually tone it down a bit.

“Beg pardon, ma’am, but I’ve ’ad a pint afore coming, and what with the cold and the fog it ’as rather gone to me ’ead. I’ll be a’right afore long.”

“Well, you’d better make up for lost time and get my parcels.”

Cleeve was perplexed. “I wonder where the blessed parcels are?” he thought. “What a fool I was not to ask Walker; I’ll be bowled out if I’m not careful before we get fairly started.” Then a brilliant idea struck him. He would put his forgetfulness down to that pint. Pushing his hand under his cap he scratched his head as he thought Molyneux would have done, and muttered as if to himself: “That pint must ’ave gone to me ’ead! I’ve clean forgot for the moment where the blooming parcels are.”

Yvonne gave an exclamation of astonishment. She had never heard Molyneux talk about “blooming parcels” before. She glanced anxiously up and down the street and noticed with dismay that the fog was getting thicker; she felt nervous as to Molyneux’s state. She had seen him a little the worse for drink before, but not quite so far gone

as to forget everything. However, it was too late to get another porter, in fact she would not know where to find one at that late hour, and she dared not trust Molyneux to get one. If he could forget where her parcels were he'd forget to send a substitute as soon as he was out of her sight.

"It's too bad of you, Molyneux, to turn up in this shameful state! You know what a lonely walk it is, and now we'll have to go all the way by road. You'll find the parcels with the ostler as usual."

"Sorry, ma'am," said Cleeve, touching his cap, and adding as he departed in the direction of the stables: "I'll be a'right presently, ma'am. I've only 'ad one pint."

As soon as Cleeve turned the corner and was out of sight he gave a low laugh. "Good Lord, what a game! A four mile walk in this fog with Yvonne's tophole, but a four mile walk back is going to be no joke; though it's getting colder now and it's just possible the fog may lift."

The stable yard was almost empty, and he had no difficulty in finding the ostler.

"I want Mrs. du Barry's parcels."

The ostler, without a word, turned on his heel and entered the harness-room, which was dimly lit by a single gas jet. "You'll find 'em in the corner," he replied as he took up a shovel and proceeded to put some more coal on the fire.

Cleeve looked round the room hesitatingly; there were still several heaps of parcels lying on the floor, but none exactly in any corner. He bent to examine the names and then, realising that if any of the parcels were overlooked it might inconvenience Yvonne, he said: "You'd better help me to put them in this sack and then there'll be no mistake."

The ostler turned round suddenly and, putting down the shovel gave Cleeve a searching look.

"I beg pardon, sir. I thought it was John Molyneux; I didn't know it was you. I think, sir, you be the gentleman who 'as taken Lady Mainwaring's shooting?"

"I am," said Cleeve briefly.

The ostler was perplexed. He couldn't think why this gentleman with a sack had taken Molyneux's place, and he

hesitated for a moment. Then reflecting that it was no business of his, and consoling himself with the thought that at any rate there could be no harm in giving Mrs. du Barry's parcels to a gentleman, he helped to place them in the sack, lifted it on to Cleeve's shoulder, pocketed the tip and said good-night.

Cleeve, with the sack of parcels slung over his shoulder, retraced his steps, but when he turned into the street Yvonne had disappeared.

"Now I've overdone it," he murmured to himself. "She's gone off without me, I've overacted that little thick-ness of speech and frightened her."

He walked to the front entrance of the hotel, and then the sound of light footfalls behind him caught his ear.

"You've been a long time, Molyneux. I thought you were never coming."

"I 'ad a difficulty in getting them parcels, ma'am," and then, anxious to disabuse her mind of any thought that John Molyneux might have had another pint at the bar before shouldering his load, he added: "I 'aven't touched another drop, ma'am, and I'm a'right now."

Yvonne gave a little laugh. "I wasn't thinking of that, Molyneux; I was thinking that I haven't got many parcels to-day."

Cleeve considered there were quite enough, but anxious to convince Yvonne of his bona fides, he thought it better to agree with her, and replied that the load was much lighter than usual in a voice less thick than before.

"I think you're getting quite yourself, John." Yvonne accompanied the remark with a merry care-free laugh.

Cleeve started slightly as she pronounced the name. So he was to be John for the rest of the journey. It sounded a nice name when it came from her lips; why was his name not John?

"Oh, I'm a'right now, ma'am," and conscious that his proximity to Yvonne was rather dangerous, he suggested that they should move off.

"I *know* what I've forgotten now," Yvonne exclaimed. "The potatoes! We'll get them at a shop a little further on. Come along, John."

"Now I'm done for," thought "John" lugubriously.

"I'll have to go into the shop with her, and then the game will be up."

But to his relief Yvonne stopped suddenly. "You'd better go in and buy them, and I'll wait for you here," and slipping a few shillings into his hand, she added: "Get twenty-eight pounds, they'll lend you another sack; and catch me up, I'll walk along slowly."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Cleeve to himself as he entered the shop. "All these parcels, and twenty-eight pounds of spuds. Cleeve, my boy, you're going to pay for this walk of yours!"

The shop being otherwise empty he was soon served and, walking off in the direction he had noticed Yvonne taking, he quickly caught her up.

"I think we'll have to go round by the road, John, you won't mind, will you? The bag's lighter than usual, for now I come to think of it I've forgotten the onions. . . . You find it lighter, don't you, John?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am!" said Cleeve, eager to agree with her and not give himself away, but to himself he added: "Now I suppose there'll be fourteen pounds of onions added to the load. My word, Molyneux surely earns his money!"

"Well, it's too late to go back now; we'll just have to manage without the onions this time."

Cleeve, following Yvonne, kept at a discreet distance until they were out of the town, for the fog was lifting, and it was not until they had left behind the last street lamp that he felt secure from detection. Suddenly Yvonne's voice, soft and sympathetic, broke the silence:

"How's Betty, John? I remember you told me last week that she's not been well lately."

The sympathy in her voice scattered his wits for the moment; she could be so charmingly sweet at times, he thought. Then, realising that she was waiting for his answer, he reflected rapidly on who "Betty" might be. He tried to remember if he had heard that John Molyneux was married and had a faint recollection that Walker had said something about it. "At any rate," he decided, "Betty can't be a man, and the chances are she is his wife." Having come to this safe conclusion, he answered her in a cheerful confident voice:

"She's a mighty sight better, thank you, ma'am," and then with the idea of getting a little of his own back, he added: "Well enough, at any rate, to indulge in the common vice of 'er sex."

"Indeed! You surprise me, John. What is that vice?"

"Well," drawled Cleeve, "she's been 'tending the bargain sales and 'as brought back enough 'ats to last her the rest of 'er life, if you axe me hanything."

He finished the sentence triumphantly and decided with satisfaction that he had "got one in there." The next moment, however, he was not so sure.

"Oh! hats enough to last a life time? I wonder where she gets all her money from? Hats aren't cheap, you know!"

"Putting my foot in it, I think," Cleeve thought ruefully. "Perhaps new hats are a bit of a luxury to working men's wives. Must go a bit cautiously. . . ."

"Well, she's rather got that craze now, more fond of 'ats than anythink else, ma'am. They're cheaper than clothes, anyway. Can't keep her off 'ats these days!" He almost shouted the last few words as Yvonne had somehow managed to rush ahead.

"Can't corner me," he chuckled to himself, well satisfied at the way he had wriggled out of what he considered an extremely embarrassing piece of conversation. "I'll celebrate this little success of mine by dropping a few spuds, it'll lighten the load!" And opening the mouth of the potato sack he allowed a dozen or more to drop on the road. He lengthened his stride and caught up Yvonne.

"I think you've made a mistake, John," she said gently. "I thought you told me it was little Betty who hadn't been well?"

Cleeve was hardly prepared to hear there were two Bettys, and this reopening of a conversation which he had thought was finished with made him reflect deeply. "I wish I had extracted a little more information about Molyneux's family when I was talking to him the other day. However, I'm beginning to get the hang of things. I can see now that Betty is my wife, otherwise there could not be a little Betty." He smothered a laugh as he thought

of his parental responsibilities, and added aloud: "Oh! *Betsy*, you mean?"

Yvonne gave an exclamation. "You've changed her name, have you?"

"Well, you see, ma'am, it got very confusing with the two of them being called the same and my old woman put 'er foot down, so to speak."

"Your old woman! And pray, who d'you call your old woman, John?"

"Doesn't like the title!" Cleeve thought. "I suppose she'd like me to be respectful to women and call her Mrs. Molyneux. Well, I just won't! It'll do her no harm to hear her own sex run down once in a way. . . . This is where I come in!"

"That's what we call our wives in these parts once we've married 'em."

"Oh, I see," said Yvonne, "you're not very complimentary then?"

"No-a," Cleeve drawled, "not nowadays. They get huppish like if you're too respectful." And then, thinking that he might as well get another shot in, he added: "You see, ma'am, your own partic'lar wife's like an angel till you've married 'er, and then you find out she's only dross, same as the rest!"

There was silence for a few moments and Cleeve, mentally patting himself on the back and thoroughly satisfied with that dig and the progress he was making in putting together vernacular sentences, murmured to himself: "That's the stuff to give her, Cleeve!"

"Well, we'll not talk about wives any more," said Yvonne in a rather subdued voice.

"Not if you're not arter 'earing a few 'ome truths, ma'am."

"I know, John, when the beer's in the truth's out, eh?" It was Yvonne's turn to give a little chuckle.

"That's about it, ma'am," Cleeve responded cheerfully, and to himself he added: "I'll just celebrate this second victory by dropping spuds," and so several more potatoes tumbled out on the road, while he reflected that after his way of talking about women he had quite turned the conversation from those complicating Bettys.

There was another long pause, and then suddenly Yvonne asked another question.

"Let me see, John, how old is Betty now? . . . Or rather, *Betsy*, I should say."

"Good Lord, on to this Betty game again!" thought Cleeve desperately. "What on earth can I say? I suppose I'd better temporise. . . ."

"I don't quite remember, ma'am. I'm still a bit fuddled from that there pint."

"Surely she must be getting quite big now?"

Cleeve considered for a moment. "'Getting quite big now,' that gives me some idea. Betsy must be either getting big enough to go to school or else getting big enough to leave; that's all they think about in working-class families. Let me see, Molyneux must be about twenty-six or seven, so it isn't likely that Betsy could be leaving school, more likely she's about old enough to go. I think I'd better decide on that line, for it won't do to be too ignorant or too reticent about this Betsy."

Yvonne broke in upon his thoughts. "I suppose she'll be going soon?"

"Thank the Lord," said Cleeve to himself, "that's another help, for I don't intend to be beaten over this Betty business!"

"Oh, yes, ma'am, she will," he replied in an important voice. "She's going to school next month."

"To school! . . . What school, John?"

"Why, the board school, ma'am. Where else can the likes of us send 'er?" Cleeve demanded in an injured voice.

A muffled laugh reached his ears and a suspicion that he had said something wrong made him swing the sack of potatoes round irritably, whereupon quite a number of potatoes made a trail along the road. He looked at the sack dubiously. "The remainder are hardly worth keeping," he thought, and on a sudden impulse he emptied the sack and, rolling it up, tucked it under his arm.

Looking up suddenly he saw that Yvonne had halted, and was inserting a key in the lock of a garden gate. Had the journey ended? And he had been treated as Molyneux all the time! He nearly bit his tongue in his effort

to stem the words that rushed to his lips. What a fool he had been not to notice how the time was passing, for it was too late now to disclose the trick he had played upon her. She would only leave him full of resentment at his duplicity and give him no opportunity to explain. Then a gleam of hope penetrated his thoughts; what a brain wave it had been to drop those potatoes. He would excuse the loss by pleading a hole in the sack and promise to bring some more to-morrow, and then he would force his way somehow into the grounds, insist on seeing her and tell her how it all had happened.

Yvonne, having opened the gate, turned and taking the parcels from him put them down on the other side. Then she looked at him with a tantalising little smile, a smile that somehow made him nervous.

"Well, John, we've had a nice walk and quite an interesting conversation, haven't we?" . . . Then as he made no reply she continued: "But I really can't believe you only had *one* pint, John. It's the first time you've talked such nonsense about your cow and her calf!" She looked at him to see the effect of her words, and as she took in his dismay and astonishment she added: "By the way, John, I didn't know you were married, you must bring your wife to see me next Thursday!"

"I'm sorry, ma'am, I think my mind *must* 'ave been wandering, not quite meself yet you see, for I find all your potatoes 'ave dropped out. Must be a 'ole in the sack. I'd best bring another sack along to-morrow, eh, ma'am?"

Yvonne slipped inside the gate and locked it before replying. She seemed to be considering his question, and Cleeve waited patiently and hopefully. The next moment he could hardly believe his ears.

"Well, good-night, Mr. Barrington," she said sweetly, "I must thank you for a most entertaining evening."

"Then you knew me all the time?" stammered Cleeve. She looked at him smilingly without speaking.

Cleeve reflected savagely on the way he had been fooled into making idiotic conversation, and full of resentment

he prepared to leave, but a sudden recollection made him turn and address her once more.

"I'll have a sack of potatoes sent to you to-morrow, Mrs. du Barry," he said coldly.

"You needn't bother, John," Yvonne replied demurely. "We grow our own."

BOOK III
AT LONGFIELD AGAIN

CHAPTER XXIV

Extract from a letter written by Mr. du Barry to Mrs. de Haviland shortly after the events narrated in the preceding chapters.

“AND now I must explain why, after promising you so faithfully that Yvonne should remain a fortnight, I sent that telegram. I am not giving an explanation to avoid your upbraiding, for, Eloise, you never upbraid, but I don't want you to think that I would willingly break my word.

“I sent that telegram at Yvonne's request, and I gather she told you this, but has she told you the circumstances which led up to it? I fancy not, for they are such that a girl like Yvonne keeps even the recollection of them buried in her heart. And beyond the few details which she gave me on the afternoon of her return I myself know very little.

“This much, however, I do know, and I tell it you in the strictest confidence and with great sorrow, that my poor girl has given her love and all that goes with it to Cleeve Barrington. Apparently he proposed, and she, true to the promise she gave me, refused him. Cleeve Barrington—I thought at first out of pique, for we all know his nature, at any rate, by repute—then proposed to Muriel Ryder and was accepted; whether it was this complication which determined Yvonne to leave your house at once I can't say, but in view of her promises to me it must be fairly obvious that she could not have remained with you, Eloise, for the full time as arranged.

“I cannot tell you how much I deplore these happenings or how bitterly disappointed I am in Cleeve Barrington. I could find some excuse for his proposing to Miss Ryder if it had been done in that mad reaction which sometimes follows a rejected suit; but from your letter telling me of his engagement I gather he has, for some time past, been

attracted by Muriel Ryder, and even proposed to her before Yvonne came on the scene. If so, why did he play with my daughter's feelings? I cannot understand it, Eloise, and that my old friend's son could behave like this comes as a tremendous shock to me. I could write much more in the same strain without laying myself open to a charge of partiality, but my friendship for his father checks my pen, and, after all, we can't alter things, so it's futile to revile. It's facts I have to face.

"I am convinced that it is the real thing with Yvonne. She sent me a most emphatic telegram to recall her, and when she arrived I tell you, Eloise, she was utterly changed. I have waited some time before writing this letter, hoping that the change was only temporary. It's not, she is just as lovable as ever, but there is a pathetic hopeless droop at the corners of her mouth which makes my heart bleed. The house seems so quiet and empty too. She laughs as frequently as she always did, but there is no ring of merriment in the laughter. If you could see her face in repose you would not recognise the Yvonne we both love so much.

"But I digress, because, I suppose, I hate to come to grips with the real motive which prompts me to write this letter. But I must come to it sooner or later. Well, Eloise dear, I don't think Yvonne should visit you again until Cleeve Barrington and Muriel Ryder are married. If Yvonne can change like this in one short visit, a second visit might be disastrous. She has already shown a desire to break her promise and I couldn't risk that, could I? You say the engagement is to be a short one as Mrs. Barrington is suffering from a serious malady, and both the old people are anxious that there should be no unnecessary delay. In these circumstances I am sure you will agree that it is better for Yvonne not to return to Swanston House until that irrevocable step has been taken?" . . .

Extract from a letter from Mrs. de Haviland to Mr. du Barry written about a month later.

"Now, Gerald, I'm going to answer that letter about Yvonne which you wrote me a week or so after her precip-

itate return. I have not answered it before, in spite of the importunate requests made in your recent letters, because I have had so much to think about in connection with what you wrote. Cleeve Barrington told me he had met Yvonne one night when he was shooting in your part of the country and accompanied her home, but he spoke about it as though it were an ordinary happening, and I certainly could not tell from his manner whether he is now in any way attracted by her. Then on his return it was understood that the wedding would take place before Lent, but recently Mrs. Barrington's malady took a serious turn. Whether the wedding will be postponed or not I can't say. Col. Barrington is broken-hearted and wedding festivities in his present state of grief are unthinkable, I should imagine. Much, of course, will depend on Cleeve, but though I can't understand his attraction for the girl it appears to be thoroughly genuine. All this naturally alters the suggestion in your letter, for Mrs. Barrington may linger on for months, and if, as you say, Yvonne seems to take her trouble more seriously as time goes on, I think she should come down here again. She is such a high-spirited girl that there is every chance of her becoming reconciled to the inevitable when she sees Cleeve and Muriel together, and I really think that it would be better for all of us if she came and stayed a month with me. She may find that her love for Cleeve is not so deep-seated after all, for the greatest antidote to love is to see the object of your affections happy in someone else's presence. So, Gerald dear, as you stated in your last letter that you would fall in with my wishes in every respect, I shall look forward to seeing Yvonne early in January." . . .

Mrs. de Haviland read through the letter several times before placing it in its envelope. She was not satisfied with what she had written, it did not portray her true sentiments. To anyone but Gerald du Barry she would have laughed at her subtlety, but she could not be subtle with him without suffering very great qualms of conscience.

"After all," she murmured to herself, "there's something to be said for the saying, 'the end justifies the means,' if I'm absolutely candid with Gerald I'll never get Yvonne

down here, I don't believe in this Cleeve-Muriel engagement one bit, and I don't see why it should wreck Yvonne's happiness. Anyone with eyes can see he's tired of Muriel already, and what's the use of treating with indifference an engagement which in the long run will bring nothing but misery to the whole three of them? No! this letter's got to go and what I can't get out of Gerald 'with the lion I'll get out with the fox.' ''

CHAPTER XXV

CLEEVE BARRINGTON came down from his dressing-room in a very dissatisfied frame of mind, so dissatisfied that he did a most unusual thing. Instead of visiting his mother in her bedroom, as was his custom before dinner, he sought the dining-room, although the hands of the clock had yet to move another quarter before the gong sounded. Then he did a more unusual thing, he walked over to the side-board, poured out a stiff whiskey and soda, tossed it down almost in one gulp, and then putting down the glass he took out a letter from his pocket and perused it for about the fifth time.

DEAR MR. BARRINGTON,

I have some news for you! My niece Yvonne has come to stay a few weeks with me, and I should be so pleased if you would come over and dine *en famille* with us to-morrow night.

Yours sincerely,

ELOISE DE HAVILAND.

P.S.—I heard of your brilliant attempt to carry parcels in a sack !!!

For a few moments he stood staring at the letter and then, suddenly crumpling it up into a ball, he threw it on the fire and ejaculated: “Damn and blast!”

He continued to stare into the fire in silent reflection.

“Looks as if every time Muriel and I seem on the way to a better understanding, Mrs. du Barry crosses my path. Down at Becclesfield, when I’d just succeeded in putting her out of mind and had reconciled myself to the inevitable with Muriel, she taps me on the shoulder and scatters all my good resolutions to the wind. Now to-day, when I’m three parts through my letter to Muriel explaining the

necessity for postponing our marriage and telling her that it's only a postponement, comes this like a bolt from the blue making every argument I used appear like the pleadings of a hypocritical vacillator who never intended to marry at all. I'm to be dogged and dragged back to mental torments by a married woman who makes no secret of her dislike for me. No, it's no use, Cleeve, my boy, you can't go on with the engagement; this letter is the last straw!"

* * * * *

"What have you settled, Cleeve?"

The speaker was Col. Barrington, and as he sat facing his son he filled his glass from the decanter of port with a somewhat shaky hand.

The fact was Col. Barrington disliked the task before him; he hated prying into his son's private affairs, nothing but his wife's illness would have made him do so, but he had to know. He realised how bitter would be Muriel's disappointment at the postponement of the marriage and yet even she must see, he argued, that, with Cleeve's mother so seriously ill, marriage at the moment was out of the question. Furthermore, Col. Barrington had an additional worry, the result of a conversation in his wife's bedroom.

"Sam, I don't think the marriage should take place," Mrs. Barrington had said.

Col. Barrington was at the time completely taken aback.

"I don't understand you, Sarah," he had said. "The wish to see Cleeve married has been as dear to your heart as mine, and now you say it shouldn't take place. I'm all in favour of a little postponement, Sarah dear, I think we rather rushed the boy, etc., etc."

Col. Barrington had turned away his face as he spoke those words; he knew his wife would never be strong enough, and that the ceremony when it did take place would be a motherless one as far as Cleeve was concerned, but he could not tell Sarah that; not his Sarah. He flattered himself that he had hidden the real cause for the postponement and prided himself on the adroit way he had introduced his pretended doubts as to the wisdom of Cleeve "rushing into marriage." That argument of his,

"You see, Sarah, it's only during the engaged period that a man really gets to know the girl," was a remarkably subtle masterpiece, and the diplomacy of his next remark, "I think in the interests of both that they should have a fairly long time to get to know each other," was, he considered, worthy of the best traditions of that most scrupulous of all places, Westminster, to which his son aspired. And then, when she had agreed, he had given a sigh of relief that his wife had not guessed the real motive which had created those arguments of his.

He had not seen his wife's face while he was speaking, had he done so he would have realised that Sarah Barrington knew the real reason for the suggested postponement as well as he did, for one little tear had rolled down her cheek before she could check herself. She had agreed to a postponement because a doubt had crept into her mind as to the wisdom of the marriage, and not because of any love for the convention that it would be unseemly for her son to rush into happiness with a mother so seriously ill that her future lay in another world.

"Well, Sam," Mrs. Barrington had replied, "you said yourself that a postponement was necessary in order that they should get to know each other. . . . Surely that implied a doubt?"

"A doubt of what, Sarah?"

"A doubt about the suitability of the engagement."

"No, Sarah. That is er . . . er," Col. Barrington had replied. "That is, Sarah, I never had any real doubt, I only wanted Cleeve to be equally convinced."

"Was there no risk of his being convinced the other way?" his wife had suggested gently.

"Of course not, dear, not with Muriel," he had reassured her. "We've always liked the girl, and a more suitable marriage I can't conceive. Mr. Ryder is the most popular parson in the county and if Cleeve marries Muriel he'll win the election when it comes."

"I've forgotten about our ambitions, Sam, I can only think of his happiness, and I feel sure it will be an unhappy marriage."

"What on earth makes you say that? When Cleeve announced his engagement didn't you tell me afterwards

that you felt sure it was for his future happiness? Oh, Sarah, dear, you are still Jack at night and John in the morning! Aren't you now, dear one?"

"Perhaps I am," Mrs. Barrington had admitted with a sad smile. "But something has changed Cleeve. He was in love with someone for those few days before he announced the engagement, I'm sure of that. There was that unmistakable look of determination and excitement in his eyes, but, Sam, it didn't last long, and lately I've come to think that the look was not there when he told us he was engaged. I can't make it out," she had added with a troubled look. "I don't pretend to know what has happened, but something surely has."

That had closed the conversation. Col. Barrington, manlike, argued from circumstances. He knew perfectly well what had happened. Cleeve's unhappiness sprang from the contemplated postponement.

* * * * *

Cleeve Barrington watched his father fill his glass and waited for the question to be repeated.

"Well, Cleeve, what have you settled, my boy?"

"I've settled nothing. To tell you the truth I'm in no mood to settle anything." Then, seeing his father's look of surprise, he, with a little more deference in his voice, added: "I really haven't had time to make up my mind."

"There's nothing to make up your mind about, Cleeve. The marriage must be postponed, your mother is far too ill. Have you spoken to Muriel yet?"

"No, I haven't." There was a ring of finality about the way Cleeve spoke, and had Col. Barrington been wise he would have pursued the matter no further, but Col. Barrington at the moment was too impatient to be wise.

"I can't stand this procrastination, Cleeve, and if you can't make up your mind to tell Muriel, I'll go and see Mr. Ryder myself and explain the circumstances to him."

"Well, that'll just about put the lid on it!"

"Put the lid on it! What do you mean? I really don't understand you, Cleeve. I don't want to interfere in your private affairs, my boy, but . . . but you know as well as I do that I'm only thinking of your mother. She won't be

with us long. . . . You couldn't marry until . . .” Col. Barrington did not finish the sentence; there was a set expression on his face and a slight twitching of his lips.

“You’ve quite mistaken my meaning, dad. I didn’t mean to tell you, but I don’t want to marry Muriel Ryder.” Cleeve rose from his chair and advanced to the door.

“Where are you going?”

“I’m going for a stroll.”

“You’ll do no such thing!” Anger vibrated in Col. Barrington’s voice as the words came out sharply like the cracks of a pistol. “I mean to have this out with you, sir, and by God I will!”

Cleeve came slowly back into the room. “We’ve had it out, sir, haven’t we? I’ve told you I don’t want to marry Muriel, but if that’s not sufficient, well, I’ll tell you I don’t care that for her,” retorted Cleeve, snapping his fingers in the air by way of emphasising that when goaded he could be as angry as his sire.

“Cleeve, you don’t know what you do want. You’ve been reckless and impetuous all your life, had everything your own way, twisted your mother round your finger, but there are limits to what I’ll stand, and I won’t have a son of mine go back on his word, I’ll see him damned first!”

“Look here, father, it’s no use getting heated about it. I admit you nettled me and I’m sorry, but you’ve taken me the wrong way. I’m as upset as you are that I can’t go through with it. I should never have proposed, but it’s only lately I’ve realised that there never was a spark of love on my side, not a vestige of a spark, only I didn’t know it at the time. I’ve been a fool, an egregious ass, if you want to know, and it’s this knowledge which makes me shun the subject, makes me procrastinate, makes me lose my temper every time I’m reminded of my ties. Leave me alone and it may all come right, but if you drive me, sir, well . . . I’ll go my own cursed way.”

For a second or two Col. Barrington was inclined to leave it at that. He realised subconsciously that he had opened this subject at an inopportune moment, but the traditional recklessness of the Barringtons was too overpowering. He adjudged Cleeve’s inclinations as if they had already been consummated. He measured others by

his own nature. He had only proposed to one woman in his life; and in his present state of heat he could only think of the misery, the unutterable misery he would have brought on his Sarah had he been unfaithful to his promise. His mind flew back to the time when they had plighted their troth. A slim, dainty figure stood before him, with soft, loving eyes looking out of the sweetest face he had ever known, and with the intuition of love he knew that had her confidence and trust in him been misplaced her spirit would have been broken, her heart dead. He would not have broken that spirit or given that heart a wound from which it would never have healed for all that earth or heaven could give him, and under the idealism of that vision, and that knowledge, Muriel also stood before him with the same trustful eyes, with a heart as big and loving as his Sarah's, and the vision so blinded his instinct and commonsense that he could see no other side of the shield but the woman's. His big, generous, impulsive heart fired his blood with the instinct of chivalrous protection.

"Drive you, sir? I don't want to drive anyone, but women's hearts are not skittles, I'd have you know! You're not a boy who might plead he didn't know his own mind, but a man and a Barrington, and if you break your promise to Muriel . . . well, sir, I'm still your father, but a father without a son to honour! No, Cleeve, no!" Col. Barrington held out a silencing hand and his eyes were ablaze with an ascetic fire which seemed to silence any sound but the ticking of the clock.

For a few moments father and son stood glaring at one another and then, silenced by that ascetic fire, Cleeve Barrington left the room.

CHAPTER XXVI

A FULL moon was shining bright and unclouded, illuminating the countryside with a pale radiance which looked ghostly beside the black shadows cast by the trees.

Cleeve Barrington walked slowly through the garden . . . pausing now and then as the vision of his father's face, filled with righteous indignation, passed through his mind . . . walked on until finally the effect wore off and he gave a low chuckle of affectionate amusement.

With head bent in deep thought he continued on his way, his steps quickening in unison with his thoughts, and it was not until he stood in the drive of Swanston House that he was aware of his surroundings. He halted for a moment and then continued to walk slowly towards the house in spite of a sudden misgiving which seized him as to the wisdom of his action. The sound of a snapping twig as someone walked away to the left caught his ear and, turning sharply, he saw a man disappearing into a clump of trees.

"It must be the head keeper," he thought, "and he must have recognised me; if it had been the new under-keeper it would have been rather awkward. He might have asked me who I was and why I was prowling round the grounds at this late hour! And what excuse could I give?"

Leaving the drive and inclining to the left he walked through the shrubbery and round to the west side of the house. The only lights to be seen came from two bedroom windows on the first floor, and he was wondering if they came from Yvonne's room, when he heard a low, suppressed ripple of laughter and, glancing quickly in the direction of the sound, saw Yvonne observing his movements from a distance.

The sight of her standing there in a shimmering dress of pale blue sequins and a snow-white ermine stole thrown

loosely over her shoulders quickened the beating of his heart, and for a moment or two he stood, as though riveted to the spot, mesmerised by conflicting emotions.

The full moon, well risen in the eastern sky, poured its slanting beams on a tall, majestic cedar of Lebanon, whose vast bulk was silhouetted against a cloudless azurine sky. The twinkling fairy lights of countless stars seemed to help the moon to adorn that cedar's branches here and there in a manner which suggested that Cupid's hand had sprinkled a gigantic Christmas-tree with the phosphorescence of his romantic world, while across the sward and between Cleeve and Yvonne was cast that cedar's shadow like some deep, unfathomable gulf which must for ever lie ominously in their paths, separating him from the El Dorado of his dreams.

"My aunt would be thrilled if she knew you spent so much of your time gazing ardently at her bedroom windows, Mr. Barrington! Do you often do this?"

"I came here hoping to see you," Cleeve replied hesitatingly, ignoring her teasing remarks.

"To see me! . . . Why?"

"I want to talk with you."

"To talk with me at this time of night!"

"Yes, to you. . . . No, don't leave me like this." He put out a detaining hand and clutched her arm, a little savagely perhaps, but it sent a shivering thrill to her throat, and the faintest of sighs escaped her lips.

"Yvonne?"

"No, not Yvonne."

"Yes, Yvonne. You've always been Yvonne to me except when I've been mad. Oh! how mad I've been, but . . ."—he hesitated—"but . . ."

"But what, Mr. Barrington?"

"It was you who maddened me."

"Oh! the woman did it? What a novel insinuation!"

"It's the truth. You may taunt me with the one excuse that's been man's standby ever since Adam trod this earth, but it's true. It's woman who casts a spell over us, and then we can't help ourselves any more than a child can help being born. God placed a weakness in our hearts, and when that is discovered we're like Samson shorn of his

locks, our strength is gone. But it's woman and only woman who knows where the weakness lies, and is it cowardly of any man to fall back on Adam's excuse when sometimes she attracts only to wound?"

"I think you're taking things too seriously, Mr. Barrington. I rather think there is a salve for every wound."

"Yes, and what is the salve? Some men, like dogs, lie and lick their wounds; that is their salve. And others go mad! But that's not a salve, it's a counter-irritant."

"And in their madness seek some other attraction!"

"I won't pretend not to see what you're driving at. In my case the attraction is Muriel Ryder, eh?"

"You are the better judge, sir."

"I've already told you that you maddened me. I . . ."

"And had I maddened you when you gave Muriel Ryder that kiss in the ballroom?"

"No, you hadn't, but I had not seen you since . . ."

"It's not fair to Miss Ryder," Yvonne broke in desperately. "I know what you're going to tell me. That you love me, and you want to force a similar confession from me, and then I suppose you'll break your engagement. Do you think I'd be a party to such a scheme even if I did love you?" She spoke the words with such withering scorn that he winced. "And do you think it fair to keep Muriel Ryder in ignorance of your real intentions, and to hold her to the engagement until you have made sure what my feelings are?"

"You're not speaking the truth, Mrs. du Barry. Although you may not have one spark of love for me, you know I'm not that kind of man. I won't trouble you with the circumstances which made me rush into this engagement, but I rushed into it quite unconscious of my real feelings towards you. I love you, I've always loved you, you and your memory, and . . . Oh! how I hate to say it, but I never loved Miss Ryder. I proposed in a fit of reckless ungovernable temper."

"Reckless temper!" Yvonne responded scornfully.

"And for my mother's sake," Cleeve continued quietly.

"You must admit it was a rather natural thing for me to propose to a girl I thought would make me a good wife

when my mother, who is . . . seriously ill, wanted to see me married."

"I think it was very weak."

"But natural in the circumstances?"

"What would you think of one of my sex," Yvonne said pointedly, "if she rushed into an engagement for the same reasons?"

"I think it would be quite nat——" Cleeve stopped abruptly as his mind substituted Yvonne for "one of my sex." He looked at her silently for a moment as he realised the justification she had for her accusation.

"We all make mistakes at times," he replied pleadingly.

"Yes, but there's no need to keep on repeating them. You proposed to Miss Ryder and it's too late to regret it. She loves you as much as any girl ever did love; I know it. You have no right to go back, you must see it through."

Then, as he remained silent, she continued wildly, passionately: "You're not free to talk to me any more than I am; it's not fair to you or me, and Miss Ryder has an even greater claim for fair dealing." She began to walk away, but was suddenly arrested by another passionate outburst.

"Fair to Muriel? Of course I've not been fair! I haven't been fair to you. If I can't be fair to the woman I love, how can I be fair to anyone? Is the blindness which has afflicted me to fall on you? Can't you see that to marry Muriel when I love you would only consummate a projected crime? Oh, how I love you, dear one, if you only knew! And the love your presence creates is everything to me. It is the love which destroys everything but the image which created it. I want nothing from you, Yvonne, but your love, and I must and will have that if I go to hell to get it!"

Those words went to her heart, they rang so true and as her steps wavered her resolve waned. She felt that they were at their final parting, that though they might meet again their real lives would be separated for ever if she left him thus. Every day she loved him more. Yes, she even loved him for his madness in rushing blindly into his engagement, she could understand it now; and she was more to blame for the tragedy than he was. She had taken him

the wrong way from the beginning, under the goading spur of bitter jealousy, and her thoughts had dwelt on the emptiness of life ever since she was aware of what she had done! And now, in the face of that cry of his, the hopelessness of life without him and the force of her own ungovernable love combined to weaken further her resolve. She stood there expectantly, with bent head and quivering lips. But Cleeve dared not move. In the blindness of his own love he could not see the invitation in her attitude. He felt she was so unattainable that he must persuade her of the reality of his love before he risked an embrace again. And Cupid, who had brought these two together under the fascination of a lover's moon turned and gave a whimsical smile, as he always does at lost opportunities.

Suddenly Yvonne threw up her head and straightened herself resolutely. No, she mustn't think about herself or her life, if she did an innocent person's happiness would be sacrificed, and perhaps two, for she could not marry, and if she wrecked his career it would ruin his life as well as Muriel's. But the fight was not yet won, the temptation to compromise was too great. Oh, what was she to do? Could she not tell him just once that she loved him?

Then some womanly instinct whispered: "Man cannot live on bread alone," and she saw through the mirage of her hopes, and facing him unflinchingly she spoke at last.

"It's Muriel we've got to consider, not our . . ." She paused, blushed deeply at her mistake, and continued impetuously. "Not your feelings." Then ashamed and confused by her slip she awakened to the need for action and hurriedly fled into the house.

CHAPTER XXVII

FOR some time Cleeve Barrington stood where Yvonne had left him gazing into space while he puffed meditatively at a cigarette.

"So my feelings are not to be considered at all!" he said to himself. "Well, I think I'll have something to say to that! But was ever a man more certainly hoist with his own petard? What on earth made me gas about the idealism of a love which should build up and not destroy? The love that builds, judging by the impulse which first prompted me to kiss Muriel, is a fantastic illusion! It builds nothing, unless you can call putting lace and furbelows on the seductive undergarments of human passion building! And that which destroys tears to pieces hope and ambition and everything that crosses its path, until nothing but the love itself remains, and that's what I've really been groping for all the time. No wonder they say that love is blind. Blind! It's nothing of the kind, the damned thing can see only too well, but it sees backwards with everything turned upside down."

Suddenly the sound of a movement behind broke his thoughts and before he could turn round he heard the suave drawling voice of Michael Tennant.

"There is an old adage which I would commend to your attention, Mr. Barrington," he said, laying stress on the "Mister." "Be off with the old love before you're on with the new."

On turning round Cleeve faced Tennant with a look of utter astonishment stamped on his face. Had this man been dogging his footsteps? for he wouldn't put that past Tennant; ever since he had meted out just punishment for the wrong done to Maud Bilton by this parvenu, Tennant had seemed to take a particular interest in all his doings. It was certainly significant that lately he was always

tumbling across Tennant, and was this present meeting the result of the peculiar interest which the man seemed to take in his movements, or was it a pure accident? The latter thought produced sinister forebodings, for it confirmed the rumour, which was going about, that Tennant had made no secret of his interest in Mrs. du Barry, whom, according to that rumour, he had met in Switzerland. And it was with no little degree of apprehension that Cleeve replied in a cold contemptuous voice:

“I think I can manage my own affairs.”

Tennant's eyes narrowed until they became mere slits in his too handsome face, but he shrugged his shoulders as he laughed softly with malevolent imperturbability.

“A stable custom I suppose, Mr. Barrington!” There was just a suspicion of a foreign accent in Tennant's sneering voice.

Cleeve felt himself wince in spite of his effort to return unmoved the evil penetrating look which accompanied Tennant's words.

“You see, Mr. Barrington,” he continued with an added sneer, for he had expected that wince, “to-night is the second occasion I have accidentally, I say accidentally, overheard a few words pass between, shall I say Mr. Barrington, a Lord of the stables and the very charming lady who has just honoured you with your *congé* for the second time of asking.”

Cleeve did not wince this time; he was trying to control his temper. The effort was only partially successful, for while he could and did control his actions he could not control his words.

“Do you want another thrashing, Mr. Tennant?”

“No, I think not this time, Mr. Barrington. I have some rather valuable information to give you in confidence as between one gentleman and another.”

“Between gentlemen, did you say?” queried Barrington sarcastically. “Since when have you laid claim to being a gentleman?”

“Since I equipped myself to meet you on an equal footing,” replied Tennant smilingly, drawing from his pocket as he spoke a heavily weighted life preserver and toying with it carelessly. “You had me at a disadvantage last

time we met, but now you're without your horse-whip and I have a weapon which is perhaps more effective. But there is surely no necessity for two gentlemen to come to blows. I've some information which will be welcome to you. Perhaps you are not aware that Yvonne du Barry is as free to marry as you are?"

"I don't want to hear anything about that from you," Cleeve retorted hotly, in spite of a strong desire to hear more, for the thought that Yvonne was free to marry was as staggering as it was unexpected.

"A very noble sentiment on your part, I'm sure," said Tennant blandly, "but your eyes belie your words. I've lately made it my business to find out Mrs. du Barry's circumstances, and although her father has very good reasons for wishing her to masquerade as a married woman, and she perhaps has equally good reasons for falling in with his wishes, the fact remains that she is not married and never has been."

There was something in Tennant's voice which convinced Cleeve he was listening to the truth. His desire to let the man continue was almost overwhelming, but to hear the woman he loved spoken of by Michael Tennant was unbearable. Much as he would have given to fathom the mystery which surrounded his idol,—for somehow at the back of his mind he had always scented a mystery,—he would have felt it disloyal to discuss Yvonne behind her back with anybody, and in no conceivable circumstances could he stoop so low as to discuss her with the man who faced him.

"I've already made it clear, Mr. Tennant, that your conversation is distasteful to me, but let me make it a little clearer. I'll have no dealings with a man who bears the brand of Cain on his brow. Let me make my meaning clearer still. I regard you as surely a murderer as if you had struck down Maud Bilton with your own hand. No, you've nothing to fear from me," he added, as Tennant took an involuntary step backward and toyed more ostentatiously than ever with the life preserver.

"I'm well aware that I've nothing to fear. Not to-night," Tennant added tauntingly.

Barrington's face flushed angrily. "No, it isn't because

of that thing. I never loathed myself more than when I thrashed you on Maud Bilton's account, for, though there's no sin like the sin of seduction, there is something repugnant in thrashing a man who takes it lying down like a cur."

"In that case we may as well have our heart to heart talk. I've already told you one interesting piece of information, I'll tell you another. I've found out that a most interesting indiscretion lies at the bottom of the mystery which surrounds Mrs. du Barry, and I think you will agree that a scandal which has made a high-spirited lady like Yvonne du Barry masquerade as a married woman is no ordinary scandal. I've already told you I'd be even with you one day, but I'll be more than even, Mr. Barrington, for I intend to use the information I possess to some purpose. I would have used it before now only I wanted to satisfy myself that Yvonne du Barry loves you. I wanted to be certain that you could lay an indisputable claim to her heart before playing my cards. I have just heard every word which has passed between you and her, as I heard every word which passed between you when you called her a harlot, and I adjudge that the time has come to act."

What stayed Cleeve's hand at this recital he never could tell. It seemed to him that his senses were numbed, for an inexperienced emotion prompted him to reply in an ultra-natural voice: "Go on, Mr. Tennant, go on."

The calmness did not deceive Tennant, for he tightened his grip on the life preserver. He knew his words were transforming Cleeve Barrington into a human tiger, a tiger which would spring if he goaded it sufficiently. Then one blow from the weapon of whalebone and lead would more than balance the many he had himself received, and so his subsequent words were specially chosen to provoke.

"The scandal is my secret, and it will remain a secret at a price, and that price is nothing less than that Yvonne du Barry shall accompany the despised Michael Tennant to the altar. As I have already told you," drawled Tennant, in a voice so emphatic of suppressed but gloating triumph that it would have roused the least excitable of men, "I overheard you call my future wife a harlot; well,

Mr. Cleeve Barrington, if you call a harlot one who sells herself for anything less than love you will live to see your words come true."

Then it happened as Tennant had expected. Cleeve saw red, a premonition of the man's power to accomplish all he said forced itself on his mind, but it was the sting of that word which boiled his blood. Swift as a lightning flash his fist shot out, just one fraction of a second before Tennant struck, but not in time to prevent the crushing blow which, just missing his head, landed heavily on Cleeve's shoulder. Then, in spite of the pain Cleeve was suffering, his hand closed on the life preserver, but there was no need to wrench it away, for Cleeve's fist had found its mark and Tennant fell on the ground, breathing heavily like one who had been put to sleep.

CHAPTER XXVIII

“MY dear Eloise, I can’t stay, I really can’t; I must catch the three o’clock train back to town, I promised Richard I would. We’re moving into our flat next week, and Richard’s so irritable, not himself at all. I’m afraid to leave him too long. He’s always saying he’s let me down, thinks I’m only what he calls ‘putting a brave face on it,’ and I can’t persuade him that it’ll be a positive relief to leave Berkeley Square. You can’t keep servants in these basement houses, and, besides, the place is too big, Eloise, for the two of us.”

“Then I think, Helen, it was hardly worth coming for,” said Mrs. de Haviland, who was more affected by her friend’s intention than by the reasons which compelled it. “You’ll have barely spent four hours with me when it’s time to go, and I’ve such a lot to talk to you about. I haven’t seen you since Yvonne went. I think I told you in my letter that she’s back again?”

At last Helen Courtney found the opening for which she was subconsciously waiting. All through lunch and for some time after, these two had talked with the old time freedom which their close friendship warranted, and, in the warmth of that friendship, Mrs. Courtney had relegated to oblivion the *raison d’être* of her visit. The name of Yvonne, which up to this moment Mrs. de Haviland had purposely omitted from her conversation, reminded Mrs. Courtney of her mission, and, with the recollection, came the return of that nervousness which she had experienced as the car, sent to meet her, drew up before the portals of Swanston House. A nervousness which had been instantly dispelled with Eloise de Haviland’s kiss of welcome. That kiss had somehow made her feel the insignificance of everything but her loyalty and love for one who had earned them,

earned them with those priceless gifts which only the heart can bestow.

“Eloise, however can you do it?” At last she had thrown out the challenge. “It’s that . . . it’s that, Eloise . . . which has brought me down.”

The look on her friend’s face as Helen Courtney uttered that broken sentence told her that what she was dreading was no phantasy of her own mind. Her friend would rather lose the friendship which all those long years of confidence had built up than allow Cleeve to marry Muriel. Such waves of opposition as she could hurl would break harmlessly on the rocks of Eloise’s determination, and it would be futile to create the storm. Her friend would never rest till she had accomplished her object. Was it wise to stake the friendship of a lifetime on a gambler’s chance? For of one thing Helen Courtney was now certain; if she failed in her mission she would only succeed in sowing those fatal seeds of misunderstanding in the garden of what, up till that time, had been to both of them a garden of mutual loyalty and respect. Then as she pondered, undecided what to do, struggling with a rising tide of nervous apprehension, the fog which surrounded her struggling thoughts was suddenly and ruthlessly lifted.

“Helen, a woman with love in her heart cannot err. I know the impulse which has brought you here, and now you’re considering whether the loss of my friendship isn’t too big a price to pay for the easing of your conscience. You feel that in lending countenance to my plot—for I’m sure you consider it nothing but a plot!—you may have encouraged me to go further than I otherwise would have done. Conscience makes cowards of us all and your conscience has troubled you unnecessarily, for you have really nothing to reproach yourself with. You’ve only rendered lip-service to my designs, Helen; for the moment I’ll put my ambition no higher than that, and in rendering that half-hearted service you have done more to undermine my determination than if you’d tried to dissuade me with the aid of impassioned appeals from your heart. But I’m determined to prevent a marriage between Cleeve Barrington and Muriel Ryder, I like him too well to countenance that,

and I intend to use every artifice of which a woman is capable to prevent it. Now you know the truth."

Helen Courtney gasped. Truly she had learnt the truth and to her bewildered mind it appeared a ghastly and an appalling truth. Why had she not seen it before? She had often heard that Eloise was more like a mother to Cleeve Barrington than a friend. This childless friend of hers was prepared to lavish all the motherly love of which she was capable on the two beings, Yvonne and Cleeve, whose immature love meetings recalled her own broken romance. In the purblindness of that broken romance she could see no other wishes but her own, no other hearts but Cleeve's and Yvonne's, and in the obscurity of that blindness Muriel's was an intangible unreality. The spur-ring effect of these thoughts acted like magic on Helen Courtney's mind, her nervousness entirely disappeared, as did the fear of losing a life-earned friendship.

"Eloise, how can you talk like that? You're not the arbiter of love that you can say, 'Cleeve does not know his own mind, neither does Muriel know hers, therefore you will not let this marriage take place.'"

"No, Helen, I'm not! . . . I'm not so omnipotent as that, only I'm getting on in years and, looking back, and thinking of what might have been, I've come to the conclusion that woman's sixth sense is her surest guide. My intuition tells me that a marriage between Muriel and Cleeve would be not only a mistake but a tragedy."

"But, Eloise, you have deliberately invited Yvonne to stay with you with the object of cutting Muriel Ryder out. Don't you see it's one thing to let things take their natural course and quite another to deliberately interfere? You've only one object in getting Yvonne down here . . . to attract Cleeve. If they weren't engaged it might be justified, but they are!"

"That's not my object . . ."

"It is your object, Eloise, and I call it heartless and inhuman," retorted Mrs. Courtney, who was somewhat surprised at her own temerity.

"You can call it other things as well, my dear, it won't make me love you less. You think because Yvonne is so like me and has in a great measure my ways that I'm blind

to the real issue, but I'm not. I don't want Yvonne to attract Cleeve any more than you do. The attraction is already there and I only want to undo what I've done. But that she will attract him in the process of undoing I've no doubt."

"Well, I don't understand you, that's all, Eloise! Can't you put yourself in Muriel's position?"

"I am not so heartless, Helen, as you think, but I don't subscribe to the creed that every engaged man should be locked up in a cage and allowed to see no one but his bride-elect until he's married. I do my best to place Yvonne in every position where she's likely to attract. I invite Cleeve to dinner *en famille* and as soon as possible find some excuse to leave them together. I waste no opportunities, not one. I happened to meet Cleeve yesterday, and he told me in the course of conversation that he was going to hunt to-day, so last night I suggested to Yvonne that a good day's hunting would put some colour in her cheeks, and . . ."

"Just to attract Cleeve?"

"No, Helen, not just to attract Cleeve, but she will attract him all the same, she rides so well," responded Mrs. de Haviland with provocative sweetness.

"A distinction without a difference, Eloise."

"No, dear, there's all the difference in the world! You're not suggesting that Yvonne shouldn't expose her figure on a horse and get a healthy glow in her cheeks just because Cleeve is engaged to Muriel Ryder, are you?"

"I'd like to know where the difference comes in! Why not put a little rouge on her cheeks and have done with it!"

"I'm afraid I've fallen very much in your estimation."

"Well, Eloise, I can't understand you, that's all. . . . Put yourself in Muriel's position."

"No, I refuse to consider my action in the light of the vested interests of any one person. It's the prevailing idea of the sanctity of these love contracts which produces many unhappy marriages."

"But it's our code, Eloise."

"Whose code?"

"Well, our social code, and besides, apart from our code, it's wrong, Eloise, and you know it's wrong."

“Helen, you’ll remember I’ve told you several times that in trying to break Yvonne’s bonds I’ve nothing to reproach myself with, and I can only think you don’t trust my assurance, and that your distrust has coloured your whole outlook.”

“No, Eloise, it’s not that. I do trust you there, I don’t know Yvonne’s circumstances, you do. But it’s not right, is it, to try and take Cleeve away from Muriel Ryder? I think it’s cruel and to my mind it somehow goes against one’s nature.”

“Nature? You speak of nature and cruelty! Why, nature and cruelty go hand in hand. We give a man two months’ imprisonment for tormenting a cat, but we don’t give a cat two months for being infinitely more cruel to a mouse it catches, we make allowances for nature. Does our social code, Helen, as you call it, make allowances? It’s man’s nature to be attracted by a pretty face and a beautiful figure, but it’s not so much ours, and we women because of our nature take advantage of that, often, Helen, a cruel advantage. If you’re honest with yourself you’ll soon realise how elastic your social code is. There’s no such thing as ‘our’ code, we all have more or less different views on these things. I suppose you’d exonerate a mother parading the charms of her daughter before any marriageable man?”

“Why yes, if he’s not engaged.”

“But to parade that daughter’s charms before an engaged man is wrong?”

“That’s what I think.”

“Why? . . . In making his selection a man is influenced by desire. I don’t mean sexual desire, a man is only superficially influenced by that, he desires a character suited to his own, or rather the counterpart of his own if he be wise, and viewed in its proper light an engagement is only a licence granted by society to enable him to put his fiancée on the dissecting table and find out what he’s letting himself in for.”

“To enable both of them to find out what they’re letting themselves in for,” retorted Mrs. Courtney defensively, for, woman-like, in these matters she saw only through the eyes of a woman.

“There I don’t agree, and I don’t think the girl’s interests need be considered. The instincts of motherhood arm her with a very sure weapon, the weapon of the actor. With that weapon in her hand she meets all who challenge her heart. The attraction of sex is, unlike that in man, entirely absent in the woman in such first encounters. She is by nature more careful in her choice of a mate, and long before a proposal comes she has, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, learnt all she wants to know.”

“Eloise, you astonish me,” interpolated Mrs. Courtney with a little note of admiration in her voice. “It’s never struck me to analyse things like you do.”

“For the simple reason, Helen, that you’ve a husband and haven’t time. No children and therefore no reason why you should; but the ‘engagement’ is a man-made convention, the outcome of our social laws. Our civilisation hedges in a young girl with so many restrictions that without a period in which the girl can throw off some of her artificial surroundings, the man could never be sure that the appeal which she makes to his nature is reciprocated by her, could never be sure that his choice is not likely to be subsequently disturbed. To give an engagement any other status is wrong. No social convention or law for that matter appeals to me, which seeks to restrict what it can’t prevent. I’ve nothing to say against the law or convention which prevents a man marrying, say, his grandmother’s aunt; it can prevent that, but I would ridicule a law which says he shall not be attracted by her, if he’s made that way he can’t help it. And no law that was ever made will prevent men being attracted by the charm of face, figure and character, short of putting a permanent bandage over their eyes. And I say we women, that is those of us who wish to make things brighter and happier in the world,—and that’s what we’re here for,—would be failing in our duty if we adopted a complacent attitude towards ill-suited engagements, especially when they concern those we love and respect.”

“Eloise, I agree with you in principle, it’s only in your methods I think you’re wrong. I know you honestly think Cleeve’s engagement a mistake, and if you confined your opposition to advice and argument I shouldn’t say any-

thing. It's the thrusting of Yvonne between them I don't like, and you'll never get me to think differently."

"Helen, my dear Helen, what's the use of advice and arguments in these cases? To tell a man that his fiancée is not the girl he thinks she is, for that's what unsuitability amounts to, only appeals to his chivalry and makes matters worse. And after all, our ideas of the girl may be entirely wrong, in which case your methods, Helen, if successful, might consummate a crime, and personally I don't like adopting any method which is doomed to failure from the start, do you?"

"I can't answer you, Eloise. I never can, but I still think you're wrong."

"I'd like to ask you a question. Suppose a son of yours got engaged to a shop girl, would you think it wrong to give a dance and invite all the pretty girls you know in the hope that he might be attracted by a girl of his own class?"

"But Muriel isn't a shop girl."

"I know that. Perhaps if she were I wouldn't object so much. But behind the mask which Muriel wears is a very different personality from that which appears to the eye. She's highly strung and hysterical, and let me tell you, Helen, she has an awful temper, an absolutely fiendish one."

"Eloise, you do surprise me."

"It's perfectly true. But I'm not laying undue stress on the personal element in this case, what I asked you, Helen, was, would you think it wrong to give a dance if you didn't approve of your son's engagement?"

"Well, put that way, I suppose I wouldn't if I had a son."

"If you were too ill to give a dance would you think it wrong of me to give a dance with the same object?"

"I've told you, Eloise, I never can answer you."

"Well, Helen, that's all I'm doing, but on a very much smaller scale. I've only invited one girl, and perhaps if I hadn't brought about this engagement by putting a few stones in Cleeve's and Yvonne's paths I might have been tempted to stand aside. But I can't do it now, I feel I'm responsible for what's taken place, and it isn't so much the happiness of Cleeve and Yvonne that concerns me now as

the unhappiness which my acts are likely to bring to Muriel."

"The car is waiting, madam."

"I suppose you must go, Helen?"

"I'm afraid I must," replied Mrs. Courtney, looking dejectedly at her wrist-watch. "I didn't notice the time, did you? D'you know I've only *just* time to run upstairs and put my hat on, or I'll miss the train!"

"I didn't, Helen, I was too keen on convincing you, dear, that I've nothing to reproach myself with. . . . You don't think I have now, do you?"

"No, Eloise. It was . . . Richard who made me come."

"How like a man," said Mrs. de Haviland when she found herself alone. And as she spoke the words a soft, caressing expression crept into her eyes.

CHAPTER XXIX

“**M**ORNING, Master,” said Cleeve, raising his hat. “ ‘Morning, Barrington. Oh! How de do, Miss Ryder?’ ” Then addressing Cleeve he added: “Glad to see you having a day with us. You and the Colonel seem to have deserted us this season. You mustn’t get into that habit, you know. We want a few of the old familiar faces. God knows hunting is difficult enough as it is. What with wire, underbred townlings who over-ride hounds and lack of funds, I don’t know what the country’s coming to!”

Sir John Swynnerton, Bart., Master of the Manorby Hounds, thumped his thigh with his crop and, refixing his eyeglass, surveyed the scene. A fine figure of a man with a weather-beaten complexion, he only lived for hunting, and a very successful Master he made.

“Yes,” answered Cleeve, “what with one thing and another this is the first day I have managed to get out. I hear you have been having quite good sport.”

“Not bad, my boy, not bad. Scent’s been a bit patchy lately and we’ve struck one or two old foxes who know the game too well. But what’s spoiling the sport is this crowd of loafers who turn up in their cars and fill the countryside with their dust and the air with raucous noises. Still we’re going to draw Whinney Copse to-day and with reasonable luck ought to have a real good run.”

The Manorby were meeting at Dourton that morning, and the meet was more than usually well attended. As Cleeve looked round he took in the whole scene with delight. Hounds were drawn up in a small field at the side of Dourton Church and were lazily sunning themselves, whilst grouped around were the followers. What a cosmopolitan crowd they were, and how the atmosphere seemed redolent of good humour. Many members of the

hunt, like Cleeve, were attired in the conventional pink and top hats, adding colour to the scene.

There was old Thrapston who had hunted regularly for thirty years, the parson from Tushbury on his cob, neighbouring squires and members of the younger generation in dark coats and bowler hats, several well-to-do farmers riding likely-looking nags, and a few lady followers, trim and neat in their well-fitting habits. The field was completed by a sprinkling of boys and one or two impecunious enthusiasts determined to follow on foot.

Cleeve turned to Muriel, who was riding a bay mare with white points.

"I'd give anything for a real good run. Do you feel like that?"

"Yes, it will be awfully nice to be together, won't it?" answered Muriel with a smile.

"I shouldn't advise you to try and keep up with my beast. It's going to be every man for himself to-day and devil take the hindmost," said Cleeve enthusiastically, and then, noticing how Muriel's face fell, he added quickly: "You know it's a stiff line of country and you shouldn't take risks with that bay. It's getting a bit too long in the tooth to be safe, Muriel!"

"But, Cleeve dear, there won't be any risk if I'm with you. You know the country so well."

"My dear Muriel, there is always risk hunting. Every fence, however small, is big enough to break one's neck over if you or your mount go the wrong way about it. Though if everyone felt that each time he sat a horse there would soon be an end to hunting."

Muriel glanced at Cleeve admiringly, fully conscious that he would be the last person in the world to let such thoughts enter his head. He looked so handsome, so capable! She felt very proud to be able to call him hers. His hunting kit set off his figure and he and his mount seemed one. That morning he was riding his favourite horse, Buster,—a powerful black thoroughbred with a white star. Buster stood about sixteen hands and had the powerful shoulders, the short barrel and the clean quarters which your true fox-hunter looks for in every horse he rides. The sheen on his coat indicated his fitness and his sensitive nostrils

sniffed the breeze eagerly as he pawed the ground and champed his bit with exuberant equine vitality.

As the time for hounds to move off approached, the numbers at the meet were increasing rapidly, not all intent on following. Some rather bent and bowed figures of both sexes who had arrived in their carriages and dog-carts were too old to ride, but their youthful hearts were still with the hunt and many of them were intent on following as best they could by highways and byways. Others, in their motor cars, were welcomed by the hunt for the sake of past associations and were not classed by the Master in his expressive words of "loafers spoiling the sport." Many of these old stagers nodded to Cleeve and Muriel with the smile of appreciation in their eyes, and sighs in their hearts for the lost past when they too looked part and parcel of their horses, admired among the many admirers.

"Hello, Cleeve, old boy! How de do, Miss Ryder. What about it, eh? Pretty big crowd and some nice girls among them."

It was young Thoroldson, a subaltern in the Guards, who was speaking.

"D'ye know who that topping looking girl is over there on that chestnut mare?" he enquired, pointing to a slim figure shown to great advantage in a smart riding habit. Cleeve looked where Thoroldson was pointing. Though he could not see her face he knew at once who it was. It was Yvonne! Good God! was she to hunt? And Mrs. de Haviland had not said a word about it! His heart gave a jump as he strove to collect his thoughts and answer unconcernedly:

"Oh, she's a niece of Mrs. de Haviland."

"A niece of Mrs. de Haviland! Do you really mean it? I didn't know Mrs. de Haviland had a niece; do you know her?"

"Yes, I've met her several times."

"Will you introduce me?"

Cleeve hesitated, his eyes riveted on that slim figure on the chestnut mare, his hand twitching as his heart commenced to beat with an energy which seemed to him to pulsate his whole being.

"Come on, Barrington, there's not much time; we'll be moving off soon."

Still Cleeve hesitated. Why should he introduce this attractive young guardsman; besides, how would Yvonne take it? It would spoil his whole day if she treated him with that imperious coldness which he knew by experience she could so easily and fittingly assume.

"Well, if you won't, I'll introduce myself," said Thoroldson. "That chap Tennant has been trying to monopolise her all the morning and I can't stand it; can't bear the chap!"

As Thoroldson spoke Tennant emerged from the group on the outskirts of which Yvonne's horse was champing its bit and pawing the ground in excitement, and came up alongside her. Without saying a word to Muriel, Cleeve moved off in Yvonne's direction, followed by Thoroldson.

"May I introduce Captain Thoroldson, Mrs. du Barry?" said Cleeve, raising his hat.

Yvonne turned in his direction, the colour suddenly fading from her cheeks, only to return with equal suddenness and added strength as she dropped her eyes and allowed the long curling lashes to hide them from view. But in spite of their drooping Tennant, and Tennant alone, had seen the look of docile dreamy softness which had crept into them before they were eclipsed, and his rather close eyes narrowed, while the corners of his mouth curled, giving the face a snarling, sinister expression.

Cleeve's absence from the hunt lately had been so marked that Tennant had felt sure of Yvonne's companionship for that day at least, and this unexpected introduction so took him by disappointed surprise that a vile curse mounted to his lips. The curse almost found expression as he speculated on the nature of the emotions which had produced such sudden changes in Yvonne's countenance; the next instant, however, he had recovered himself, and forcing a smile which brought into prominence his perfectly shaped teeth, while inwardly he was literally foaming with impotent rage, he raised his cap in a manner markedly punctilious.

"Good morning, Mr. Barrington." The words came out with mock sweetness. "Let me congratulate you; I only

heard of your engagement the other day, that is, I didn't believe it possible after the conversation of yours I overheard the other day, quite by accident, I assure you," Tennant added apologetically. He turned to Yvonne, who suddenly terminated her introductory greeting with Thoroldson as the significance of Tennant's remarks struck her.

"A conversation you overheard, Mr. Tennant? How intriguing!" said Yvonne, never thinking for one moment that her conversation with Cleeve that night in the ground of Swanston House was responsible for Tennant's remarks.

"Ah, very!" There was an undercurrent of cutting sarcasm in Tennant's tone. "I'm afraid our local Don Juan has forgotten the adage, 'Be off with the old love before you're on with the new,'" he added, speaking with the assumed indifference of friendly banter which rendered it impossible in Yvonne's presence for Cleeve to make a suitable reply.

"Don Juan! Is that your nickname now, Barrington? 'Pon my word, Tennant, you do surprise me," said Thoroldson. "I thought he, like Caesar's wife, was above suspicion!"

"Still waters run deep——" began Tennant.

"Cleeve! Cleeve! Will you come and tighten my girths? I'm sure my saddle's slipping."

It was Muriel calling. She had resented the abrupt manner in which Cleeve had left her. With nothing tangible to go upon, her woman's intuition had scented something of the attraction which Yvonne's presence in the field had created, and this had determined her to follow and rescue Cleeve from that attraction.

"This is getting more intriguing, Mr. Tennant. Don't you think so, Captain Thoroldson? . . . Really, I'm most interested!" said Yvonne, forcing herself to speak lightly, in spite of the pain in her heart which Tennant's words had produced. She could respect Cleeve Barrington for loving Muriel Ryder; that, so to speak, was a rub of the green which every woman must always be prepared to reckon with, but to hear her idol referred to as the "local Don Juan," accompanied by a reference to "still waters" and "overheard" conversations was a blow her *amour propre*

could not take lightly; for in spite of the bantering tone of Tennant's voice she read the contemptuous insinuation he had intended his words to convey.

"Still waters run deep, did you say, Mr. Tennant?"

"Cleeve, I'll fall if you don't come soon!" said Muriel plaintively.

Cleeve showed no sign that he had heard Muriel's voice, the suddenness and subtlety of Tennant's attack had infuriated him almost beyond endurance. How could he tell Yvonne in Thoroldson's presence that it was the meeting which they had had that moonlight night in the grounds of Swanston House that Tennant was referring to? Other things apart, his chivalrous loyalty to one whose image had been the guiding-star of his hope for so many years forbade it; the disadvantage of crossing swords with so unscrupulous a coward as Tennant was obvious even to Cleeve Barrington's mind, doped as it was with a passion which at another time and place would have stopped at nothing. While through his head there rang the cry: "Keep cool, keep cool for her sake," a cry which only partially succeeded in tempering the reckless impetuosity of the blood which flowed in his veins. Should he call the man a murderer again and slash him across the face with his hunting whip? Should he attempt to laugh it off and save the blow for another day?

"Will none of you go to Miss Ryder's assistance?" There was a look of reproach in Yvonne's eyes, a look which Cleeve can still recall.

As if the remark had been addressed to him, Thoroldson turned his horse and cantered over to Muriel Ryder.

"It's you she wants, Mr. Barrington."

Cleeve noticed the deathly pallor of Yvonne's face as she spoke, read the anguish in her eyes, and interpreting these as signs of disapprobation for what a woman might easily consider callous conduct on his part, he also turned his horse and follow Thoroldson.

"Don Juan! Still waters run deep? What does it mean?" Yvonne was unaware that she had spoken the words in an audible whisper.

"I fancy Maud Bilton could tell you the meaning if she were alive."

“How dare you! How dare you say such a thing to me!”

“So that’s how the land lies, is it, Mrs. du Barry? ‘Therefore is winged Cupid painted blind’!” There was a subtle sneer in Tennant’s voice, and then looking Yvonne straight in the face, he extended his hand. “I, too, can love, Mrs. du Barry, and for the sake of that love I, too, can be blind.”

“It is not true, Mr. Tennant?”

“It is true! You know it’s true; would I speak of any man like that if his hand was fit to shake?”

“It’s not true, Mr. Tennant! Oh, God, it can’t be true?”

Tennant lowered his eyes and bent his head to hide the look of triumph which he could hardly repress. Yvonne, mistaking his attitude for that of a man struggling to reconcile his conscience with a desire to temper the blow for her sake, manœuvered her horse quite close, reached over, took his hand in hers, and, gripping it firmly under the stress of her emotion, whispered in a voice so unnatural that even Tennant was momentarily stirred: “It—is—not—true!”

“It’s not true,” came the reply.

“You mean—you mean, Mr. Tennant?”

“I mean that the secret is safe with me,” and then, looking straight into her eyes again, he added: “But remember, Mrs. du Barry, if I cannot accuse, you must not expect me to hide my loathing for the despoiler of Maud Bilton.”

“You hate him so much?” Yvonne uttered the words as though she were pleading for the generosity of a chivalrous man for one who, in spite of all, had by virtue of her love a claim for mercy.

Tennant was quick to catch the incredulous intonation in her voice and, resenting it with the vehemence born of the knowledge that he had not utterly destroyed his rival, retorted with such a ring of truth that it was calculated to convince even the most sceptical partisan: “I hate him so much, Mrs. du Barry, that I’d wring his neck if I got the chance!”

CHAPTER XXX

FURTHER conversation was checked as hounds moved off and the field fell into procession behind. Cleeve strove to master his agitation and thrust out the knowledge that all his old love for Yvonne was again reborn. How well she sat her horse! He thought she had never looked to greater advantage. After Tennant's vile insinuations what must she think of him?

"Really, Cleeve, I don't know you to-day; you're so absent-minded! Do you know I've asked you three questions and all you said was yes when I expected you to say no, and no when you should have said neither!"

"I'm sorry, Muriel."

"D'you know you've absolutely ignored me all morning? I don't think it's kind of you!"

"Muriel dear, I'm sorry. The fact of the matter is, that chap Tennant annoyed me; if I get half a chance I'll give him another horse whipping, and I won't half do it next time."

"Oh, Cleeve, you frighten me, talking like that! You haven't quarrelled with him, not really?"

"Yes, I have, and I gave him a good thrashing some time ago, but apparently I didn't give him half enough."

"What did he do?"

"Oh, I don't know, that is, I can't tell you, not now at any rate, it's too long a story; but you can be sure he deserved it."

"I thought you two were having words, that's why I called you," said Muriel, blushing at the utterance of a lie which camouflaged the real motive which had inspired her call. "It would never do to have a scene at a meet, and you are so impetuous, Cleeve, I really do get frightened at times."

Cleeve neither saw Muriel's blushes nor heard her words,

for he had noticed with no little degree of apprehension that Tennant was still with Yvonne and the two appeared to him as though they were on terms of more than ordinary intimacy.

At this juncture the Master's voice could be heard addressing a couple of youths, who, leaning against a gate, were feasting their eyes on the advancing procession.

"Hi! Open that gate, lads, will you?"

The youths responding with alacrity opened the gate and the hunt entered the field, which led to Whinney Copse.

A few moments later hounds were put into the Copse and every one waited quietly while the Master and his staff urged the pack to its work. Excitement was rising, horses were as eager as their riders to be off, and a last opportunity was taken for tightening girths.

"Not much music yet," said a keen-looking farmer to Cleeve. "Hope we're not going to have a day like last Thursday; did nothing but draw all day and every one a blank."

Hardly had he spoken when a hound or two gave tongue—then the covert echoed with spasmodic hunting calls as the Master and huntsmen worked up the straggling pack.

Suddenly from the far end the welcome cry, "Fox away!" was borne on the air; followed the sound of a horn as the huntsman, breaking through, called the pack to the scent and then hounds were seen streaming out in full cry at the extreme end of the spinney.

"He'll run down wind and make for Threseltine Brow," cried Cleeve to Muriel, jamming his hat down, tightening his grip and preparing for the ride of his life,—for the joy of the chase, his agitation at the sight of Yvonne, and Tennant's taunting gibes had made him over keen.

"I didn't expect the break so far down. I think we're behind the whole field, Muriel, and I mean to lead it to-day if I risk my neck to do it. For God's sake don't try to go my pace," he shouted as he broke into a rather quicker canter than usual and then almost immediately urged his horse to the gallop.

In every hunt there are the men who ride straight, the men who ride safe, and those who jog along comfortably in the rear, quite satisfied if they can keep the field in view

after the first quarter of an hour. Cleeve was one who rode straight, and to-day he felt as if nothing could stop him.

Down past Powling Mill, over mixed country to Littlewood, and across the railway for Threseltine Brow he fled, spurred on by the sight of Yvonne and Tennant well up in the field quite half a mile ahead,—for Whinney Copse is very nearly three-quarters of a mile long and Cleeve and Muriel had been well behind at the start.

“Aren’t we going at it too hard, Cleeve? We’re not warming our horses to the work as you’re always reminding me,” Muriel shouted from behind him.

“You go safe, Muriel. Buster, like his master, doesn’t want warming, not this time,” said Cleeve, now settling well down in his saddle preparatory to getting the most out of his mount, for to his surprise, although he had passed many riders, he had gained little on that pair in front on whom his eyes were glued. A field of turf, a low ditch, and they were crossing a narrow stretch of plough. Ordinarily Cleeve would have checked the pace on such heavy going, but to-day, though he sensed that they were in for a long run and that every ounce would be needed later on, he failed to do so. Down a lane they thundered and then left-handed over stubble. At the far end of the field was five feet of timber; many were safely over, though the numbers were thinning through refusals and a few spills. Hounds were well up the rise on the field beyond going strong and the pace was a cracker. With his eyes on that timber Cleeve saw two horses cheek by jowl rise to the jump and then over. “Well over!” he could not help the words escaping his lips. He had gained a little on those two, but he had an uncomfortable feeling that he had taken too much out of Buster. Muriel had already fallen behind, and now he was close on to the jump. Unconsciously, as he approached, he checked the pace and then, giving his horse its head, he cleared it like a bird.

“By gad, Cleeve, you took that well,” Thoroldson shouted in his rear. “Nearly went a purler myself. Pace hot, eh?”

“Not half hot enough,” Cleeve shouted back, jamming his hat well down again. “It’ll be hotter than hell before we’ve done with it, I hope!”

Hounds were now making for Heathcote and one could go across country or round by road. The road attracted most. Cleeve, bent on riding straight, noticed in a hasty glance round that only about a baker's dozen were prepared to follow the trail, and then his eyes re-riveted themselves on those two figures, close behind the Master, leading the field. For a mile of straightforward country they galloped on, with hounds a fair distance in front, running well, noses close to the ground, tails straight. If they only kept this up it would be a day to remember! Across Mornington Park they raced, and it looked as if the pack would soon have its quarry.

Now Cleeve was urging his horse and closing up on those two in front. A grim smile of satisfaction spread over his face; he was rather less than a hundred yards behind, with Reynard in sight, making diagonally for the railway again. Would he cross the line? Cleeve decided that he would and rode straight for the crossing-gate. Those ahead kept on. Suddenly Reynard turned, swung right-handed, dashed through the railway hedge, mounted the embankment, paused for a moment, glanced at his pursuers and disappeared down the other side. The remainder of the field turned and made for the gate.

As Cleeve found himself alongside Yvonne's chestnut mare his mind became more normal, and in the little breathing space which the check had given them he noticed with apprehension that his horse was somewhat spent. But he had not much time for contemplation even if he had been in the mood for it, for hounds were well away in front again and once over the railway the Master, superbly mounted, again set a stiffish pace. They had been going hard for nearly forty minutes, and as they thundered on again Buster seemed to pick up; he was the kind of horse that would pick up, the kind that would go till he dropped. He had scented his master's desire to lead the field and regarded those two horses which had set the pace as born enemies.

"It's worth having a bit of fire in a horse," thought Cleeve, "to be spared the mortification of urging along a tired mount."

Hounds were now a good two hundred yards in front,

making straight for Littlewood. Down the village street, to the joy of the villagers, through Farmer Brown's rick-yard and they were in open country again. Reynard, still game enough, retained a comfortable lead, and hounds were now running mute as they exerted all their energy to pull him down before he gained comparative safety in the thicket on Sluington Brow.

"It's a good two miles," thought Cleeve, "now for a race!" and as if the thought had been transmitted to his mount, Buster drew ahead to the left of Tennant's roan, with Yvonne's chestnut mare a few yards to his right. There was a rather steep dip to Conston Brook and then a gentle rise, but the fence was ugly. It would need careful riding to negotiate the brook for the ground on this side was somewhat marshy and treacherous after the rain. But Cleeve knew the country well, and a little to the left was a fairly good take off. To bear in that direction he would have to lead Tennant by a clear length and there was a little more than two hundred yards to gain it in. Could his spent horse do it? His spurless heels closed on Buster's flank; that grip was like an exhortation to a human being. Buster knew what was expected of him. Though tired and blown he responded, found a strength he did not really possess. He understood his master as his master understood him. In fifty yards he was clear, and in another fifty a safe distance ahead. Glancing quickly round Cleeve saw that Yvonne was well up behind.

"For God's sake follow me if you value your neck, Mrs. du Barry," he shouted, well aware that Tennant was riding to an enticing looking gap in the fence, which, on account of the take off, promised a certain fall. The brook was now fifty yards ahead and looking back again he saw Yvonne was following him. He noticed that Tennant had also changed direction; the latter had checked his horse and was now half a dozen lengths behind.

"Steady, boy," Cleeve muttered as he drew near, then giving Buster the rein again, he felt him rise to the water. It was an anxious moment. The power of Buster's haunches was obviously on the wane; would he clear? He heard the sickening rattle of his horse's hind hoofs as they struck the top bar of the fence on the other side—

he was in for a fall—no! he was over. But it was not the light landing Buster usually made, Cleeve could feel that wobbly movement which preceeds a fall and then quickly, by some miraculous effort, Buster had recovered and was on his way up the rise. The sound of the other two horses as they cleared the brook reached him and his trained ears told him the landings were true. He began to mount the rise, but Tennant was drawing level on his left, with Yvonne close behind.

“Take this ride as an omen for our relative success, Barrington,” said Tennant tauntingly under his breath, as he noticed with satisfaction Buster’s heaving flanks.

Yes, the game horse was done, he had been ridden too hard and without care and Tennant had also noticed the lunging movements and lowered head.

The rise mounted, Cleeve saw hounds close behind Reynard, and heard them giving tongue, for Reynard’s pace had suddenly slackened and it was obvious he could not gain sanctuary. Only one fence between hounds and the field which bounded Sluington Brow, so near and yet so far for Reynard’s hopes. His mouth open, tongue lolling, spent and exhausted, tail brushing the ground, Reynard went through the fence at a pace little more than a crawl, and close behind hounds pressed through, their fatigue forgotten in the excitement of a certain kill.

Momentarily Cleeve’s thoughts had wandered. Like all true sportsmen, now that Reynard was cornered a little wave of pity gripped his heart, but it suddenly vanished as he realised that Tennant was a neck ahead, a hundred and fifty yards from a fence with one possible jump just wide enough for one horse at a time. He looked at Tennant’s face and read there that it was to be a race for the gap. But oh! the horror of it, Yvonne was only a couple of lengths behind, and it was quite obvious to Cleeve that Tennant was not trying to get a real lead. And then an appalling thought entered his mind; he had heard of men deliberately fouling, but he had never come across an instance in his life. He knew now, however, that he had read that intention in Tennant’s face. A hundred yards from the fence and Tennant had only slightly increased his lead. The buttocks of his horse were level with Buster’s shoulder;

a pull over to the right and Buster would be down. He saw it coming and instantly Buster felt a check on his bridle and made an effort to slacken pace. But someone else had seen it coming too. There was the sound of a riding whip whistling through the air, a smart cut on a horse's flank and then like a flash the chestnut mare drew level and ahead.

"Make way, Mr. Tennant, make way!" Yvonne cried in a ringing commanding voice, but the call came too late . . . Tennant had already pulled over for the foul, and it was the shoulder of the chestnut which collided with the roan. Yvonne gave an involuntary cry of horror, the chestnut crumpled and, falling in its stride, dropped heavily, flinging Yvonne to the ground, where she lay in a limp, twisted heap.

CHAPTER XXXI

“I’M NOT at all satisfied about your niece, Mrs. de Haviland,” said Dr. Mornington about a week after the accident. “I think we ought to call in Sir David Watson again if there’s no improvement in the morning.”

“You think there’s a change for the worse, doctor?”

“Well, I won’t go so far as to say that, but there’s no improvement. All this delirium is very weakening. Nurse tells me again this morning that she’s done nothing but rave about Mr. Barrington all night, and it’s always the accident. I’m beginning to wonder if anything exceptional occurred or whether it was just a pure and simple accident. . . . Have you questioned Mr. Barrington about it?”

“Yes, I have, but he asked me not to say anything.”

“I think I ought to know. There’s something quite out of the ordinary worrying your niece, and I’m beginning to think it might be advisable to let Mr. Barrington visit her, but before deciding I’d like to know what really did happen.”

“I thought you said it wasn’t advisable for him to visit her?”

“From the point of view of Mrs. du Barry’s future peace of mind I still think so. I’m going to speak quite openly, Mrs. de Haviland, we doctors have to sometimes. She’s raving about the accident all the time, and in her ravings she makes no secret of her love for Mr. Barrington. When I was more hopeful of her recovery than I am now I wished to safeguard her from experiencing any possible future remorse. I take it Mr. Barrington would not make love to a married woman and that your niece is too honourable to allow him to do so. Consequently any affection she may have for him must, up till now, have been buried in her heart. In Mr. Barrington’s presence I thought it

just possible she might suddenly come round, and in her weak state say something that would not only cause her lifelong regret, but so seriously trouble her mind as to retard her ultimate recovery. As a medical man I have a very unbiassed mind with regard to these ravings. It doesn't by any means follow that patients' ramblings reflect the true state of their normal minds, but in your niece's case I'm beginning to think they do; there's something in her constant call for Mr. Barrington, I'm sure. Her anxiety of mind is too real for it to be simply the outcome of the accident, and under the circumstances I'm beginning to think that a visit from him might have a soothing effect. My duty now is to try and save her life, the future must take care of itself. If I knew what really happened it would give me an idea as to her thoughts and emotions immediately preceding the accident, so I think you should have no qualms about telling me what Mr. Barrington said."

"It's rather a long story, Doctor, but the relevant part can be told briefly. Mr. Tennant was riding just in front of Cleeve, with Yvonne close behind. Cleeve's horse was blown and he thinks Mr. Tennant noticed this and deliberately pulled over for a foul. To avoid it Cleeve somehow managed to check his horse in time, but as he did so he heard Yvonne shout: 'Make way, Mr. Tennant,' and the next instant she had dashed in front of Cleeve and taken the foul herself."

"H'm!"

"I'm afraid it doesn't help you very much."

"Yes, it does. I thought something like that must have occurred. I don't like to think that it was a deliberate foul, but it wouldn't surprise me if Mrs. du Barry read that intention. Women have very peculiar intuitions at times, not always correct ones, by the way. She probably knew Mr. Barrington's horse was so exhausted it was bound to go down if it was hustled, and she probably saw him in her imagination thrown from his horse and lying helpless. That phantasy of her mind must have existed, I've little doubt about it, and, under the stress of the great emotion such thoughts would naturally create, that phantasy is photographed, so to speak, on her brain. She has no

recollection of the fall,—they never have—and now the thought that he is terribly injured, and the love which prompted her self sacrifice, keeps her brain working so furiously that it cannot throw off the obsession. Under the circumstances I think Mr. Barrington had better see her.”

There was a knock at the door and Wilson entered.

“If you please, madam, Mr. Barrington has called. Shall I say that Mrs. du Barry is about the same?”

“No, ask him to come in. . . . That is, if you’ve finished, Doctor?”

“Yes, I’ll just go up and see nurse again. Keep Mr. Barrington for a minute or two, will you? If we’re going to let him see her, well, the sooner the better.”

* * * * *

A little later Cleeve was mounting the stairs, his heart pulsating wildly. As he approached Yvonne’s room he slackened his pace, for the doctor and nurse were standing in the corridor talking together in impressive undertones.

As Cleeve drew nearer the conversation ceased, and Dr. Mornington, after motioning him to follow, entered Yvonne’s room.

Cleeve advanced slowly, his heart torn with anguish at the incessant murmuring of a weak voice, a voice so low and feeble that it was scarcely audible.

A lump rose in his throat and a feeling of unutterable grief added to that eerie, creepy feeling which comes upon us all when we enter for the first time the room of one who is hovering between life and death. The blinds were drawn, but even in that dim light, a dimness which was accentuated to him because his eyes were not accustomed to the semi-darkness, he saw the havoc which illness had wrought. The pale, drawn face was still beautiful, but so changed that Cleeve gave an involuntary start.

“Cleeve, why do you lie there so still and quiet? Don’t you hear me? . . . Heart of mine, only one word and I’ll be happy.”

Cleeve’s lips parted. “Yvonne!” The word came out involuntarily like a cry of pain. It, too, was low and almost inaudible, but there was a world of caress in the way it

rolled from his lips. His eyes had now grown more accustomed to the dimness and he saw the startled, unbelieving expression which flitted across Yvonne's face.

Slowly the tired eyes were turned towards him and their expression was that of one who faintly heard the sound of a long-expected voice.

"Yvonne, I am here."

With those words every vestige of unbelief disappeared from her expression. A little flush suffused the pale cheeks, the two hands, which had lain fumbling and picking at the bedclothes, made an effort towards him, but they dropped back from sheer weakness.

The doctor and nurse exchanged looks and tiptoed out of the room.

"Leave them together for a few minutes, nurse," said Dr. Mornington in a rather grave but relieved undertone. "I'll go and tell Mrs. de Haviland she's recovered consciousness."

* * * * *

The large double doors of the main entrance, opening on to the terrace, stood ajar, for the day was warm and spring-like, and Muriel Ryder hesitated with her finger on the bell-push.

She had called every morning since the accident to enquire how the patient progressed, and every morning she had left with a feeling of heaviness. The house was always so quiet, even the servants looked tired and worn as though Yvonne's troubles were theirs, and it was perfectly obvious to Muriel Ryder, as it was to so many callers, that Mrs. de Haviland was not the only one in that household who missed the influence of Yvonne's ever present appeal.

Human nature quickly responds to the language of the heart and Yvonne spoke that language in every word she uttered, in everything she did.

Even Wilson forgot he was the butler in the smile which accompanied her morning greeting. It was a spring carol to his ears, and he used to hang about the foot of the staircase, sometimes, it must be admitted, to the detriment of his work, rather than miss the first opportunity of paying the homage which all men pay in abundance when the chords of their forgotten youth are struck anew.

To-day the house seemed to Muriel Ryder quieter than ever, and as a matter of fact it was. Dr. Mornington had made a longer stay than usual, and its significance had not been lost. She hesitated to ring and the open door seemed to invite her in. It would be better to step quietly upstairs, she thought, tap lightly at the door, as Wilson did when he accompanied her; wait for the nurse to appear, enquire about the patient, and depart without disturbing anyone. . . .

* * * * *

At the top of the stairs she suddenly halted and clutched the heavy banister as though reeling from a blow. . . .

“Yvonne dear, I’ve always loved you, and why didn’t you tell me before that you loved me?”

The words, though quietly spoken, thundered like the sound of drums in her ears, stirring her whole being. She forgot herself, forgot her mission, forgot her intentions, and walked slowly with hesitating steps towards Yvonne’s room—for she knew without being told from whence and from whose throat the words came—as though some invisible magnet was drawing her on. And then the sight which met her eyes struck her like a blow. . . . Cleeve’s arm was round Yvonne’s shoulders, his free hand smoothing back the hair from her fevered brow. For a moment all power of motion left her. Standing there as though petrified, she saw Cleeve—“Her Cleeve,”—bend over and gently, lovingly, lingeringly touch Yvonne’s lips with his. Something snapped in her brain, rendering her mentally blind. She did not see the unsuccessful effort, unsuccessful through sheer weakness, which Yvonne made to return Cleeve’s embrace, nor the white drawn face of the victim of circumstances who was clinging so feebly to the threads of life. She was not even conscious of her own outraged love.

“Oh, God! Oh, God!” She uttered the words hysterically like one bereft of her senses.

A shudder passed over Yvonne’s face, she turned wide, startled eyes towards the door, and then her hold on consciousness relaxed. Cleeve quickly but gently removed his arm and turned angrily towards the intruder.

One glance at his face was enough for Muriel, she read in that glance his intention, and fear and defiance struggled for mastery in a brain already more than half demented. And then it happened, as it sometimes does happen to highly strung people who have been schooled to keep their feelings under control, that the schooling of a lifetime was instantly swept away and raw, naked, savage passion rendered more terrible the hysteria which held her in its grip. She feared that look, but fear only added to her mental terror. With the blind fury of an animal driven to madness by fright, and goaded by torment, she only saw, as if through a red mist, the woman who had brought all this on her; and then defiance won.

Muriel Ryder sprang towards the bed, and before Cleeve could prevent her, even before he had grasped her intention, she seized Yvonne by the shoulders, shook her violently with the strength of a maniac, and then in a paroxysm of absolutely ungovernable rage dashed the lifeless form back on the pillows and fled the room.

CHAPTER XXXII

“THE Rev. Mr. Ryder!” Wilson announced the name in a voice shorn of its usual self-possession.

“Good afternoon, Mrs. de Haviland. Could I . . . er . . .” Mr. Ryder stopped speaking as his eyes fell on Cleeve Barrington, and the agitation, which was plainly visible in his manner, increased as he bowed rather stiffly.

Cleeve, who was on the point of extending his hand, suddenly changed his mind and, turning to Mrs. de Haviland, said: “If you’ll excuse me, I’ll go and smoke a cigarette on the terrace.”

“You won’t go far, will you, Cleeve? I forgot to tell you that Dr. Mornington is expected any minute and you know he wants to see you particularly.”

* * * * *

“This is a terrible thing, a terrible thing!” Mr. Ryder burst out, barely giving Cleeve time to shut the door. He dropped wearily into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

“A terrible thing, Mrs. de Haviland,” he said again. “Has Mrs. du Barry recovered consciousness? . . . And my poor girl, my poor girl,” he continued without waiting for a reply. “I can’t blame her, and you wouldn’t, Mrs. de Haviland, if you saw her remorse.”

The Rev. Mr. Ryder looked at Mrs. de Haviland appealingly, but she remained silent.

He sighed heavily, passed his hand nervously across his brow, and spoke again. “How is Mrs. du Barry? Is she conscious?”

“No, she is no better,” said Mrs. de Haviland in a slow, deliberate voice. “The specialist from London went yesterday, he can do nothing. It is only a . . . question of time.”

“Oh, God, succour us in the hour of our affliction,” cried

Mr. Ryder wildly. "Oh, God, have mercy upon us! My child, my child, what will she do?"

"And Yvonne, Mr. Ryder?"

Mr. Ryder ignored the interruption. "Would to God this had never happened. Had Mrs. du Barry really recovered consciousness when Muriel . . . came here?"

If that question had arisen a day or two earlier Mrs. de Haviland would have come out with the truth. For two days after Yvonne's relapse she had been beside herself with distraction. Her sympathy had all been with Yvonne, who lay on her bed breathing so imperceptibly that life appeared extinct. But she had given much thought to what had occurred since then and had taken no little measure of blame upon herself. Why had not she let Muriel, Yvonne and Cleeve work out their own salvation in their own way? Why had she sought to place obstacles in the path of Cleeve and her niece? Why had she brought them together again? She had been an unscrupulous schemer, and because of that the castle which she had built on a foundation of desire lay in ruins at her feet. Yvonne's death would be as much at her door as at the door of Muriel Ryder, and how could she let this heartbroken parent think that Muriel was solely and entirely to blame?

"I don't think Yvonne did really recover consciousness," she whispered faintly, and in the face of such visible grief she felt that the recording angel would enter that lie on the credit side of her life's account.

Mr. Ryder clutched at that sentence as a drowning man clutches at a straw.

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. de Haviland, thank you for your honesty! Muriel thinks she had, but then the poor girl was distracted, distracted!"

"I don't think she had," Mrs. de Haviland repeated more emphatically. "And I also think that the end would have been the same."

"Does the doctor think that?"

"I don't know what the doctor thinks."

That sentence was not spoken quite so convincingly, for Dr. Mornington had made no secret of his belief that the inflammation of the neck bones was the result of the shaking. . . .

"You see, Mrs. de Haviland," he had said, "quite apart from the injury to her head, she very nearly dislocated her neck from the fall, and that shaking has set up acute inflammation. It wasn't there before."

"May I stay until the doctor comes?" Mr. Ryder asked diffidently.

"Dr. Mornington is with her now and I thought he would be down before this," responded Mrs. de Haviland, and then they both relapsed into silence, a silence which continued until broken by the entry of Dr. Mornington.

Mrs. de Haviland glanced at his face and read the message he had to convey.

"Can I go up and see her?" she demanded breathlessly.

"I don't think visits can harm her now," he pronounced slowly. "Her ravings have returned. Is your brother coming?"

"He's arriving by the four train, I think the car has already gone to meet it," Mrs. de Haviland replied dully.

Leaving the room she encountered Wilson standing dejectedly outside in the hall.

"Go and find Mr. Barrington, Wilson, I think he's out on the terrace. And tell him to come up to Mrs. du Barry's room at once."

* * * * *

Left alone, the two men remained silent for some time; each was embarrassed in the other's presence. It was Mr. Ryder who spoke first.

"Is there no hope, doctor?"

"I'm afraid not."

"You don't think my girl is responsible for it, do you?" Mr. Ryder anxiously awaited the reply, for, in spite of Mrs. de Haviland's statements, there still remained great doubt in his mind as to whether Yvonne had recovered consciousness when his daughter created that scene in her room.

Dr. Mornington was expecting this question, and it was that expectancy which had caused his embarrassment.

The grief and sorrow which Mr. Ryder was so obviously suffering touched Dr. Mornington's heart and the stern lines of his face relaxed, but he was too conscientious a man to buoy up anyone's false hopes. It would be his duty to

refuse a certificate, and then a coroner's jury would have to decide whether the accident or Muriel's conduct was the primary cause of death. The specialist was firm in his conviction that in Yvonne's weak state, following on the shock her spine had received, the shaking was the cause of the inflammation in the neck.

"Mornington," he had said on the eve of his departure, "It's very painful for me to have to say it, but our duty is plain. We can't put *this* down to the accident."

Dr. Mornington leant over the side of his chair and laid a hand on Mr. Ryder's shoulders, but before he could speak the door flew open and Mrs. de Haviland rushed in.

"She has recovered consciousness!"

The two men leapt to their feet.

"What!" Dr. Mornington stared at her incredulously.

"Yes, it's true!" Mrs. de Haviland was so excited the words tumbled over one another. "The nurse said I was to tell you she has turned the corner."

Joy and unbounded relief leapt into the Rev. Mr. Ryder's eyes. "Thank heaven! I forgive her now. As a Christian I should have forgiven her before, but I couldn't! It was too much to forgive."

Mrs. de Haviland stared at him uncomprehendingly and then, as she realised he was referring to Yvonne, the fire of passionate indignation filled her eyes.

"Forgive her! What have you to forgive?"

"I forgive the sin of a married woman, Mrs. de Haviland," Mr. Ryder rejoined gravely.

"Then let me tell you that Yvonne has no sin for you to forgive," retorted Mrs. de Haviland vehemently, too furious to heed the unwisdom of her words. "She has as much right to love Cleeve Barrington as your daughter."

Mrs. de Haviland had not heard the knock at the door, nor did she hear Wilson announcing Mr. du Barry, but, turning round quickly to leave the room, she saw his tall, aristocratic figure, but a figure not quite so erect as formerly, standing just behind her.

"Eloise!" There was a note of reproach in Mr. du Barry's voice.

"Oh, Gerald, my own Gerald!" She almost sobbed the words, and then, before the astonished gaze of two pair of

eyes—for neither Dr. Mornington nor Mr. Ryder had ever seen Mrs. de Haviland show such emotion—she threw her arms round his neck and clung to him convulsively, while big, hot tears rolled down her cheeks.

Mr. Ryder looked uncertainly at Dr. Mornington and, interpreting the expression in his eyes, followed him out of the room and gently shut the door. Outside the door Mr. Ryder gave vent to his astonishment.

“Rather an embarrassing sisterly greeting?” he said with raised eyebrows.

Dr. Mornington hesitated before replying and then decided to answer the question with a shrug of his shoulders. It was not the Gerald du Barry he had known some twenty years ago.

CHAPTER XXXIII

ELTON placed the wine decanters in front of Col. Barrington and left father and son together smoking their after-dinner cigars.

"Confound Muriel Ryder!" ejaculated Col. Barrington, as he refilled his glass and then, turning suddenly to Cleeve, he added: "I've never heard of such a low-down trick."

"I don't see anything low-down in it at all, sir," replied Cleeve. "Surely it's a woman's privilege to change her mind?"

"Privilege fiddlesticks! I don't know what Ryder means by allowing it! I'm not thinking so much about you, Cleeve," retorted Col. Barrington, trying to hide the real cause of his chagrin. I'm thinking more of the prospects of the Party. You no sooner have every prospect of being nominated as the Conservative candidate on the strength of your prospective marriage, than the hussy finds out she can't go through with it. Just listen to what Ryder says. . . ."

Col. Barrington drew a letter from his pocket and read aloud. . . .

"'My poor girl has come to the conclusion that temperamental differences leave her no other choice.' . . . Did you ever hear such an excuse! When she's known you all your life! Temperamental differences forsooth! Did you ever hear such high-sounding rot for sheer damned fickleness? No other choice egad! There's more in that than meets the eye.'"

The old Colonel spluttered out more spasmodic condemnations, what time Cleeve maintained a discreet silence, waiting for the storm of words to abate. He could have allayed the storm if he were in a position to explain, but not only did a sense of justice dictate silence, but agreement demanded it. For at a meeting when Mrs. de Haviland,

Mr. Ryder, Dr. Mornington and he were present, it had been arranged that not one word of what had transpired, on that memorable occasion when Muriel Ryder had burst into Yvonne's room, should be allowed to leak out. Even Yvonne's mad ravings were to be suppressed in view of the fact that on her return to complete consciousness every detail connected with her partial recovery and relapse was obliterated from her mind. Consequently Cleeve had to remain an unwilling and silent listener, and Col. Barrington, exasperated at his son's continued silence, suddenly turned on him with an irate demand.

"It's no use sitting there like a stuck pig, Cleeve! I want to know what you're going to do."

"Well, I don't think I'll go for a stroll on this occasion," replied Cleeve with a sly wink. "Now you're wound up, Guv'nor, I'm wondering what you're going to say next!"

"Will you answer my question, sir, and not sit there like a complacent ass with a silly grin on your face! What are you going to do?"

"There's nothing to be done," Cleeve said calmly. "The engagement's definitely broken off and there's the end of it as far as I can see."

"Yes, yes, I know that! But what I mean is, what are you going to do about it, going to take it lying down or going to get someone else damned quick?"

"I think I'll change my mind and go for a stroll."

"Do be serious, Cleeve," Col. Barrington implored, for that threat of Cleeve's had a slightly calming effect. "I really think you should see some town life for a bit; go into society, you'll meet a nice girl there. After all, expense is no object, my boy, where your happiness is concerned, and this broken engagement has worried me more than I care to admit."

There was a frown of anxiety on his brow as he spoke, and then his eyes became stern again as his thoughts flashed once more on what he considered Muriel's outrageous conduct.

"As for Muriel Ryder, I've done with her for good and all. I've never heard of such a trumped-up excuse before . . . leaves her no other choice! If it isn't trumped-up, then it's idiotic! Why, if every girl broke off her

engagement because she found out temperamental differences left her no other choice a pretty fine mess things would get into, there'd be no marriages at all! If the girl had right on her side I wouldn't for a moment suggest your looking round so quickly, but as it is I tell you frankly," here Col. Barrington paused to take breath in the heat of his indignation. "I tell you frankly, Cleeve, if I were in your place I'd get engaged as quickly as possible after such treatment. By gad, Cleeve, it would give me more satisfaction than you imagine to hear you've got someone else in your mind's eye."

"Just as a solace to your pride," Cleeve suggested with twinkling eyes.

Col. Barrington stared for a moment and, seeing nothing but good humour in his son's expression, admitted cheerfully: "Well, well, perhaps, my boy, perhaps!"

"What about parsons?"

"Eh? What d'you mean, boy?"

"You're always having a sly dig at them because they don't practise what they preach, and it strikes me you're now imitating them," said Cleeve with a chuckle.

"I don't quite see the connection, and I wouldn't imitate a parson after this if there was no other way of getting to heaven!"

"Well, father, you've often told me that the cursed pride of the Barringtons should be trampled under foot, and now you glory in the pride which demands that I should seek another engagement."

"Yes, by gad, Cleeve, I do!" said Col. Barrington explosively. "There are times when pride should be trampled in the dust, but there are other times when it should be allowed to run riot, and it'll be a proud day for me when you are engaged to someone else."

"Are you sincere, father?"

"Absolutely, my boy, absolutely!"

"Do you think your sincerity could stand a test?"

"I should think so," said the old man confidently, then, rising from his chair, he walked with an upright carriage over to the fireplace, stood with his back to it, blew out a puff of smoke from his cigar and watched it rise slowly in

the air as he added: "I should think so. Even if you said you were going to marry a charwoman!"

He looked up in surprise as silence greeted his jocularities, but something in his son's face arrested his attention. He knew Cleeve, whatever he did, would not disgrace his family.

"Why, Cleeve!" he exclaimed delightedly, advancing towards the table again. "You don't mean to say you're thinking of someone already?"

"Yes . . . I am."

"And is your old dad to be allowed to share the knowledge at this juncture?" Col. Barrington demanded eagerly.

"Yes, certainly," Cleeve said with a suspiciously grave air. "I'm thinking of Yvonne!"

"G . . . good God!" Col. Barrington stuttered with consternation. "You don't know what you're talking about. She's . . ." He pulled himself up in time, and then added hurriedly: "She's married already!"

"It doesn't matter whether she's married or not. She's going to be married again, that's all."

Col. Barrington received this statement in open-mouthed silence, his eyes blinking rapidly.

"You never can," he gasped when he had recovered somewhat from the shock which Cleeve's words had produced.

"I think her love is as great as mine, and if I'm right, then I think our love together will be strong enough to find a way out."

Col. Barrington was too dazed to find a suitable reply; he stood staring helplessly at his son, and the latter walked towards the door and, opening it, added conclusively: "Now, father, I think I'll go for that stroll."

For some minutes after his son's departure Col. Barrington sat in silent dejection in his chair, but after a while he rose and walked upstairs to his wife's room. He thought he saw the hidden hand of Eloise de Haviland in all this, and he cursed the recklessness of the Barringtons, but he cursed much more a promise he had given some twenty years ago.

* * * * *

"This is an unexpected pleasure," said Mrs. de Haviland

as Cleeve Barrington—pointedly ignoring the offer of an easy chair which she had drawn up in her effort to give him the warmest of welcomes—deliberately walked over to the chesterfield and sat down beside Yvonne.

“An unexpected hate!” The words were only heard by Yvonne, but the look which accompanied them was so whimsical that she burst into a merry peal of laughter.

The laugh sounded like music in his ears; it somehow seemed to lighten the anxiety of the thoughts that had made him put off this particular visit to Swanston House till this, Yvonne’s last night. He was going to ask her for her love, and the knowledge that he already possessed it in no way relieved his anxiety. He now knew that he had always possessed it; for Mrs. de Haviland had told him many things which Yvonne had confessed in her delirium, things which were more or less unintelligible to Mrs. de Haviland, but which to him, in the light of the fuller knowledge of all the events which had marked his meetings with Yvonne, were perfectly plain. His present anxiety sprang from the knowledge that Yvonne was entirely ignorant of all she had said and all that had happened when she lay so near to death. And her capacity to fence,—unsophisticated as he was in the ways of women,—told him that if she could hide her love and defend it as successfully as she had done, she was quite capable of hiding and defending it again.

Considering that she had confessed she was free to love, the motive which had incited her to the convincing repulses she had administered was to him unfathomable, but he did not minimise its strength or attempt to delude himself that it was removed. To-night, however, he meant to fight as he had never fought before. He had told his father he would marry Yvonne and he would in the end, no matter how long it took to gain her consent. If only he could get Yvonne to admit what she had admitted during that brief lucid interval of hers, which Muriel had brought to so disastrous an end, he felt the way would be paved to a better future understanding, and such an understanding he meant to have. Yvonne’s laugh buoyed his hopes. She had made a very rapid recovery and now, little more than two months after the events narrated in the previous

chapters, she was almost her usual self again. But never, not even before the accident, had he heard her laugh quite so merrily; it was such an enthusiastic and spontaneous outburst that, somehow, he seized on it as a harbinger of favourable developments, and in so much his anxiety was relieved. He felt more normal and natural than he had ever felt before in her presence.

"You're not very gallant to-night, Cleeve. I was saying this is an unexpected pleasure."

"Not at all, Mrs. de Haviland; I meant to come."

"You needn't be super gallant! I was speaking of our unexpected pleasure. To whom are our thanks due?"

"To an irate and exasperated parent. You see, the gov'nor has always wanted me to marry and settle down, and as I have already proposed once, he now wants me to make a habit of it!"

"And you naturally want to look round first?"

"Not at all; I fell in with the idea at once."

"Then why an irate parent or an exasperated one?"

"Because he wants to have a say in the choice of who it shall fall on." Cleeve accompanied the words with a low chuckle.

"And your choice differs?"

"Precisely so."

"Well, Cleeve, you know the old adage . . . 'You can't put an old head on young shoulders'!"

"Yes, I do know it! Am I ever likely to forget it? It's line one, page one, of the child's guide to happiness!"

Both Mrs. de Haviland and Yvonne burst into a hearty laugh.

"But," Cleeve continued, "it's equally true to say you can't put a young head on old shoulders."

"I don't agree with you there, Cleeve. In their hearts the old are always young."

"It's the head I'm concerned about, the heart can take jolly good care of itself, I think. But when a parent, who has got his heart's desire, wants to subordinate a young heart to an old head, then I say he's asking for exasperation!"

"But Col. Barrington is so level-headed, I should think

that any objection of his to a particular choice would have solid foundation."

"As his objection is not specific, but generic, your advocacy fails."

The conversation was taking a line which Cleeve welcomed; his replies were more or less leading, and Mrs. de Haviland, whether by accident or design, he knew not which, was replying in a way which fitted in with his purpose.

"Cleeve, your choice has not fallen on any one who is beneath you?"

"In some ways, yes."

Yvonne gave a little start, hardly a movement, barely a tremor, but Cleeve was conscious of it and his spirits soared higher.

"In her station of life?"

"Oh, dear no! . . . But why should I be cross-examined like this?"

"Because I'm interested," said Mrs. de Haviland laughingly, and then after a pause: "In what way then?"

"Only in her love!"

"But Col. Barrington can't know that, can he?"

"No."

"Then what is there to object to?"

"He objects to her class."

"Well, really, Cleeve, I must give it up. She's not beneath you, and yet Col. Barrington objects. . . . Is she an actress?"

"Good Lord, yes! But it's not her profession."

"Does she earn her living?"

"I should say no, but I don't really know very much about her."

"But you must know to what class she belongs? Really, Cleeve, you are unreasonable. Can't you see I want to know, and it's like trying to squeeze blood from a stone."

"Oh, yes, I think you might say she is in the . . . er . . . married women class."

"A widow, eh?"

"No, a married woman."

"A married woman!" ejaculated Mrs. de Haviland with such well-simulated surprise that Cleeve was under

the impression it was a genuine shock. "You mean you're going to propose to a married woman?"

Cleeve was looking intently at Yvonne, but her face was immobile, and he searched in vain for any sign that she was interested.

"Cleeve, you're not serious?"

"Never more serious in my life."

"Well, I think it's absolutely immoral to contemplate such a thing, and I'm sure you agree with me," said Mrs. de Haviland, turning her gaze on her niece.

"Perhaps it's a case of 'the woman tempted me,' Aunt Eloise. You've always said men are weak creatures."

"They shouldn't be where a married woman is concerned, Yvonne," and as she rose from her chair Mrs. de Haviland added in a voice which suggested a change in the conversation: "I can't believe you're serious, Cleeve, but if you are I must have a further talk with you about it, though not now, for I've some letters to write and I don't like to hear you talking like this."

She gave a hurried but significant glance in Yvonne's direction as she left the room.

"Phew! Good Lord, hot stuff, almost made me perspire! I wonder if she really meant it?"

"Do you think my aunt is in the habit of saying things she doesn't mean, Mr. Barrington?"

"I think all women make a practice of it. It's because of that I came to-night. I want to find out how many times you will say what you don't mean to the question I'm continually asking."

Yvonne rose from the chesterfield and, standing before him, paused for a second before replying.

"You needn't bother to ask it. You've done nothing but talk about proposing to a married woman all the evening, and do you think I don't know what you've come for?"

In spite of every good resolution to the contrary Cleeve found himself suddenly goaded and, jumping up, faced her with angry eyes.

She stared at him steadily, saw the determination stamped on his features, noticed the obstinate poise of his chin and the compression of his lips. The savage instincts

of his primitive manhood thrilled her anew and, as if to goad him more, she reseated herself on the chesterfield and leant back languidly in one corner as though she wished to convey the impression that anything he had to say was really of no material consequence.

“Mrs. du Barry, I came here determined not to be——”

“Yvonne,” she corrected him demurely.

Involuntarily he stepped back. “Yvonne?” he repeated wonderingly. “Are you mad or am I?”

“Yes, Cleeve, I am mad. There’s no need to ask me your silly question, you savage man!” And, before he could realise the changed atmosphere which her words had created, she drew down his head and kissed him on the lips.

He did not move, he stood there like one dazed, but in his eyes there gradually grew the expression of one who has had the attainment of his greatest desire thrust upon him.

CHAPTER XXXIV

“**M**ONSIEUR BARRINGTON, Seigneur.” The foreign-looking butler bowed deferentially as Cleeve entered, and then left the room, closing the door noiselessly behind him.

Mr. du Barry, slim, aristocratic looking, immaculately dressed, rose from the chair in which he had been sitting, while gazing meditatively into the big open fire, watching the flames trying to leap up the chimney and flickering and dying in the attempt.

“I can’t say, Mr. Barrington, that this is a pleasure,” Mr. du Barry spoke the words in a tone more indicative of reproach than of resentment as he extended his hand. “I’m afraid our conversation will open old sores as far as I’m concerned, while as for you, sir, I regret that you did not take my letter as final. Believe me, there are very good reasons why Yvonne cannot marry, and I understand she has told you so as emphatically as I have. . . . Won’t you sit down.” He indicated a comfortable chair drawn up to the fire facing the one he had previously occupied.

Cleeve seated himself and waited until Mr. du Barry was comfortably re-seated before replying.

“Miss du Barry did not go quite so far as that; she said I must of course obtain your consent, and I’m afraid, sir, in this case I can’t take an unqualified no for an answer.”

Anger flickered for a moment in Mr. du Barry’s eyes at the obstinate ring in Cleeve’s voice, but his reply was delivered with calmness.

“If you would spare my feelings, Mr. Barrington, you would not press this matter.”

“I don’t see why I should spare your feelings, sir, when mine are not considered!”

“And hers; I was thinking of her feelings more than mine when I spoke, Mr. Barrington.”

"I'm thinking of hers, too. You know your daughter as well as I do, perhaps better, and you know she's not the kind of girl to say she would free herself for the man she loved—and she has said that to me—unless it was her fixed intention at the time to do so. I suppose you don't doubt that she really does love me, and that I'm equally in love with her?"

Mr. du Barry made no reply, and Cleeve's hot temper, which he had with difficulty restrained under the injustice he felt he was suffering, escaped control. "Surely I'm entitled to know the reasons which have made her change her mind, for I presume you don't wish to imply that her feelings towards me have changed?"

"Mr. Barrington, I wish you to clearly understand that I resent your coming here at all; I only agreed to it because I meant to convince you that a marriage with Yvonne is absolutely impossible. It should be sufficient for you to know that there are reasons, and that Yvonne, when I made them known to her, thought them sufficiently grave to write and tell you how impossible even the contemplation of a marriage is. I think she also has told you that any attempt to gain knowledge of those reasons which have influenced her decision would cause her infinite pain."

"That's true, but she hardly went so far at Longfield; to be quite candid, she thought it possible to obtain your consent, and I'm not sure that when Yvonne wrote that letter she was quite a free agent. Surely it's natural and right for me to want to know what the objection really is?"

"You may consider it quite natural, Mr. Barrington, but I don't. I think it's presumption. Because you're in love with my daughter you have no right to demand to share a secret which belongs to me. No, wait!" He held up his hand commandingly. "I want to tell you how your actions appear to me. Until last Thursday, when you proposed to her, you thought she was a married woman——"

"Yes, but an unhappily married woman," Cleeve interposed swiftly.

"That doesn't matter. No man has a right to make love to another man's wife."

"But she isn't another man's wife."

"As far as you were aware she was, and you deliberately

made love to her. I consider that absolutely immoral. The promise my daughter made me is as binding as any vow a married woman can make, and I think your conduct is wholly despicable. Please understand that, with her consent, you have seen Yvonne for the last time. I've placed no ban on her writing to you, I might have done so had she been willing, but if she refuses to give you any information you may be sure you'll not get it from me."

"Yes, I shall. I'm not leaving until I do; as for your insinuation about my making love to a married woman, I've never had anything more to go on than that she wore a wedding ring, and I loved her before I found even that out."

"You threaten me?"

No, that's the last card I shall play. I've come here to plead. If I can't convince you to-day that I'm entitled to some measure of justice I mean to stay here till I do. You see, Mr. du Barry, Yvonne's happiness is a great deal more to me than my own, and I ask you to put yourself in my position. If you ever loved anyone better than your own life, would you not make every possible effort to find out what was condemning the woman you love to live exiled from it? It's Yvonne I'm thinking of, not myself. I'm a Barrington, and a Barrington . . . "

"Yes! yes! I know what you're going to say . . . a Barrington can be trusted . . . Sam Barrington was my greatest friend. But there are some things which Sam Barrington's son is not entitled to know."

At the sound of his father's name Cleeve suddenly remembered the letter reposing in his pocket and drawing it out he handed it to Mr. du Barry.

"I'm sorry I forgot to give it to you before, for which, perhaps, the rather extraordinary way you greeted me is responsible."

Mr. du Barry ripped open the envelope with a shaking hand and withdrew the letter. Slowly, as though he were reluctant to learn its contents, he unfolded the letter and then began to read it very slowly and carefully.

For some minutes there was dead silence as Mr. du Barry read and re-read the letter and then suddenly Cleeve heard him speaking.

"This completely alters the case," he said, tapping the letter nervously on his thumb nail. "Your father makes an appeal I cannot resist, I'll go and talk it over with Yvonne, if you will excuse me for a few moments."

Cleeve sat there for what appeared an interminable time, but in reality only half an hour had elapsed when Mr. du Barry returned to the room and, carefully shutting the door behind him, resumed his seat by the fire. "You can marry Yvonne, Cleeve Barrington, on one condition . . . if you will agree to it?"

Cleeve was so overjoyed that he would have agreed to any condition, no matter how irksome, and it was only for form's sake he replied: "And that condition, sir?"

"Is that you will not ask Yvonne any awkward questions. You will just accept the fact that she is free to marry you and agree that the reasons which induced me to oppose it shall remain a closed book. . . . Now," he added in a less formal tone, "I want to tell you that there is no man I would rather have for my daughter's husband than the son of my old friend, Sam Barrington. Here's my hand, Cleeve, and please forgive me for speaking to you as I did this afternoon."

"There is nothing to forgive," Cleeve replied sincerely.

A rather sad smile, not entirely free from anxiety, was on Mr. du Barry's face as they gripped hands, but something in Cleeve's grasp gave the old man confidence, and there was no trace of anxiety in his face as he added: "And now, if you go into the drawing-room Yvonne will give you a cup of tea, and perhaps I shall join you later when I have answered your father's letter."

CHAPTER XXXV

“**J**OLLY sorry I had to send you that letter, Cleeve. Couldn't be helped, you know, couldn't be helped. Case of Party before anything. Had to tell you to hurry up and get engaged or married or spliced or something; presume you mean to go through with it this time?”

“I shouldn't object to giving you fairly long odds on it, sir.”

“That's good! I believe in treating young fellers like dogs . . . give 'em one free bite, I say, but no more. Only met the lady once or twice, but should say she's your match all right. Wasn't particularly partial to your other choice. . . . You know what I mean. . . . Blood and thunder's your drop, not milk and water, eh? Women are like horses, just like horses, sir. . . . The more breeding and spirit they've got and the more difficult to manage, the better you like 'em. And I should say Mrs. du Barry's all that, eh? . . . Hearty congratulations, Cleeve, and I mean it, my boy, I mean it!”

Admiral Travers, R.N., chairman of the Conservative Association, having delivered himself of this oration extended his hand and gave Cleeve a hearty seaman's grip.

“Thank you very much, Admiral. I am to be congratulated, there's no mistake about it.”

“And when's it coming off?”

“Almost immediately.”

“That's good. Sooner the better from our point of view. Fact is Parliament's going to be dissolved, no doubt about it, not a shadow. 'Tween ourselves again the election's fixed for the nineteenth of next month. Had a deuced good fight with the other members of the committee, but I stuck up for you, my boy, and this engagement just turned the scale. Featherstone, the publican, was your real opponent. . . . Worships the parson, Ryder, you know. Said Ryder without his politics—and he hasn't got any!—counted for

more than a wife. Fact that Miss Ryder jilted yer,—those were his words—would make people say there was something wrong on your side. Then asked me point blank if I knew Mrs. du Barry.”

“I don’t see what my engagement’s got to do with him,” said Cleeve hotly. “Why, it’s only a few months ago he asked the gov’nor to reduce his rent as nobody was drinking beer these days of high prices, and the gov’nor did it. That’s all you get for doing Featherstone a good turn!”

“Ah, there you go, young blood again! Conservative candidate’s got to put up with that kind of thing. Your private life becomes your public life, my boy. . . . So I said I did know her. Featherstone said ‘Is she a vote getter?’ . . . So you see he’s not so much against you after all, eh? . . . I’m really on the spot this morning, you read that.”

Cleeve perused the letter handed to him.

Chief Conservative Whip Office.

To the Chairman,
Conservative Association,
Longfield Division.

DEAR SIR,

We understand you have no strong local candidate for the General Election which, I am directed to inform you in strict confidence, will take place on or about the nineteenth of next month, and Sir James Older would feel it a signal honour and favour if you could see your way to nominate the Hon. Bruce Compton at as early a date as possible. Sir James considers that the debating powers of our front bench should be increased at all costs and, as sometimes happens, the oratory which is so telling in the House is not so telling in the constituencies: the Hon. Bruce Compton’s oratory is of this class. He holds the House rivetted with the forcefulness of his arguments, but his rather trenchant phrases and uncompromising attitude towards unconstitutional propaganda have been somewhat resented in the working class constituency he now represents, and we understand that an unofficial Conservative candidate is to oppose him. Sir James is very doubtful of having a clear working majority and is particularly desirous that his prospective ministers should secure safe seats.

Headquarters have no wish to impose their will on your Association, but, in the absence of a powerful local candidate, Sir James thinks that you would have no objection to considering the claims of the Hon. Bruce Compton. I would be very glad if you could let me have the views of your committee as soon as possible.

"That letter explains why I wrote, Cleeve. Confounded nuisance and all that, bringing you from Becclesfield so soon, but Party before everything, that's my motto. I wrote to say you were a damned strong local candidate, . . . Votes? I said, can Mrs. du Barry get votes? Look here, Featherstone, if I were a staunch Liberal and Mrs. du Barry asked me for my vote, by Gad, I'd be tempted to give it her! That mayn't be vote catching, but it's vote snatching, and that's just as good, Featherstone. . . . 'Will she go round kissing women's babies like Mrs. Lowther, the Liberal candidate's wife?' Featherstone asked. . . . Then I crumpled him up, Cleeve, I crumpled him up. . . . I said she would rather kiss a man any day. No bribery and corruption about her, I can tell you. . . . Kiss your babies? . . . I said she ain't got a mouth for kissing babies, except her own. . . . 'Well, will she kiss me?' he said sharp as anything. . . . Kiss you? I said, if you got on your marrowbones and prayed for a week she wouldn't kiss you! But she'd get your vote, Featherstone, all the same, you can take that from me. . . . 'Then I votes we have Barrington,' he said, 'I wouldn't do the Colonel a bad turn, he's been a real good friend to me, but his son isn't going to stand for this constituency unless he's going to get in. I was afraid this Ryder business would be a hard nut to crack.' . . . Played my trump then, Cleeve, surprised the whole committee, told them that Ryder, like the real sportsman he is, had consented to be present on your platform. By Gad, that made a change! Whole committee burst into a cheer. You'll have a walk-over, Cleeve, for the women like you, and the men will like Yvonne. . . . Oh yes, we'll call her Yvonne now she's going to be one of us."

Cleeve laughed. "I've no objection to your calling her Yvonne."

"Wouldn't care a tinker's damn if you had, Cleeve!"

* * * * *

A warm welcome awaited Cleeve on his return home. It was a sunny day and Col. Barrington was pacing the terrace impatiently.

"What have you been doing, Cleeve? Train's been in a couple of hours ago," were his greeting words, and without

awaiting an answer he added: "Got some good news for you."

"I know," said Cleeve, "I've just met old Travers. He stopped me on the way up and told me the committee have adopted me as their candidate."

"That's the good news I had for you. I'm sorry you met him, I wanted to be the first to tell you. It's a real good stroke of luck, isn't it?"

"It is for me, but it's a jolly bad stroke of luck for the constituency!"

Col. Barrington laughed. "Not a bit of it! Every member of Parliament has to be a beginner some time, and there's one thing you won't do, and that's betray the agricultural interests. You're honest and outspoken and that's what our people want. They don't want to be fed up with a lot of lies and promises that can't be fulfilled. Country's sick of that sort of thing. But come in and see your mother, she's very much better, you'll be delighted. You'll find me in the library when you're ready, and I'll show you the heap of telegrams waiting for you."

* * * * *

Half an hour later Cleeve entered the library and saw piled up on the large oak refectory table an imposing heap of unopened telegrams and then, transferring his gaze to the beaming face of his father who was standing with his back to the fireplace, he gave an enigmatical smile and selected a telegram from the heap. By some lucky coincidence it was a very important one.

Hearty congratulations. Hope to attend your first meeting. Am an ardent Conservative now for your sake.—RYDER.

A smile of pleasure lit up Cleeve's face and his father, seeing the smile, with almost boyish enthusiasm plucked the telegram out of his hand.

"My word, this is good news, Cleeve. Fancy Padre Ryder entering politics, it'll stir the whole countryside!"

"Yes, it will, and I think it's really sporting of him, but what on earth am I to do? I can't answer all these," said Cleeve surveying, with a clouded face, the heap of telegrams on the table.

"You've got to and we'll manage it somehow. . . . I've engaged a secretary for you . . . a lady, Cleeve."

"I'm not going to have any lady secretary messing about me, Guv'nor."

"Why not?"

"They're more bother than they're worth. I understand their sole idea of work is making tea. No, Guv'nor, it won't do. I would much prefer a man. There's young Featherstone, he's had a good education and I like him."

"Well, unfortunately, Cleeve, I've engaged her."

"Don't let that worry you, we'll get rid of her somehow: I really can't put up with a woman secretary, she'll be opening all sorts of letters . . . by mistake, of course; they can't get over their natural curiosity."

"It's too late, Cleeve, it's done. She's arriving by the six train, I've just had a wire."

"Well, Guv'nor, it's you who've lost your head this time; why didn't you wait? Surely I'm entitled to have some say in the matter; she's coming by the six train, you say. Well I think there's only one thing to do and that is for you to meet the train, explain how the mistake happened, and say you'll write and send her a cheque."

"I was going to propose, Cleeve, that you met the train, but I'll meet it myself, I can see it's no use asking you to change your mind when you're in this mood. It'll be rather hard on her to send her back, but you're so obstinate it's no use doing anything else. I shan't interfere again, Cleeve, I'll leave you to make whatever mess you like with your arrangements." Col. Barrington spoke these sentences in a rather provocative manner, and then seeing his son was still in no mood to compromise he gave an impatient snort of disgust and hurriedly left the room.

For the remainder of the day Col. Barrington kept out of Cleeve's way. He had lunch upstairs with his wife as usual, but when tea time came round and he failed to put in an appearance, Cleeve somewhat regretted those hasty words of the morning, and went in search of his father.

"Do you know where the guv'nor is, Elton?"

"He's in his study, Mr. Cleeve. He said he had a lot of work to do and didn't want to be disturbed, but he's ordered the car round at a quarter to six."

A few seconds later Cleeve burst unceremoniously into his father's study. "Look here, Guv'nor, what's the meaning of this?"

"Nothing much, Cleeve, only I'm disappointed. I don't like telling a lady secretary she's not wanted, and I'm just sitting here screwing up my courage. I'll look such a damned fool. Sent the girl a wire to come at once and now, because you're so obstinate, I've to go and send her back. All because you're frightened she'll open your letters from Yvonne. What does it matter if she does?"

"Guv'nor, I'm not going to see you upset yourself like this; after all you did it to help me, and as you don't like the task of sending her back I'll meet the train myself."

And so it happened that at five to six, Cleeve found himself walking up and down the platform in a perfectly calm frame of mind. He would send her back jolly quickly . . . quite easy. . . . His father had made a mistake, a woman secretary was quite unsuitable for parliamentary work. He would send her a cheque for a month's salary by return of post and pay her fare; simple as anything. And on the way back he would call round and see young Featherstone, and that load would be off his mind. . . .

There was a slight roar on the rails and Cleeve, looking down the line, saw the express from London rushing into the station. Followed the grinding of brakes on the wheels as the train drew up with the noise of escaping steam hissing out in great white clouds from the engine. A solitary door opened and a feminine gloved hand was thrust out of the window.

"Good Lord, travels first-class! Dainty looking hand, too dainty for work, I should think. I know the sort . . . bobbed hair and transparent silk stockings."

Realising the meeting was at hand, he gave thought to his opening greeting. Good Lord, he'd forgotten to ask her name! Well, he would go and ask her if she were the secretary Col. Barrington had engaged.

Then he saw another door opening. It was a third-class one this time, and true to life the bobbed hair and transparent silk stockings emerged. Cleeve was so close to the owner that they almost collided.

"Are you the secretary Col. Barrington engaged?"

A perky face, with merry, laughing blue eyes stared into his.

"I'm the secretary," she admitted in a surprisingly musical voice. A fascinating dimple deepened in her cheek as she smiled, and Cleeve thought he had not quite such an easy task after all.

"I'm Mr. Barrington," he managed to get out. . . . "And . . ."

But she was speaking again. "I was told I would be met. It is good of you to come; I shouldn't have known what to do."

The train was moving out of the station, but Cleeve noticed only those expressive eyes. The merriment had died away and there was something sad and careworn in their expression now. She looked so frank and honest that her stockings and bobbed hair seemed a wrong setting, and Cleeve was puzzled.

"You don't know what this appointment means to me," she said naively. "My mother's ill, you know." She spoke as if he had known all about her, and he wondered if his mother had played an important part in the appointment. She was always doing people good turns, and perhaps that was why his father had been so hasty. No, it was not such an easy task to send the girl away. No wonder his father hadn't liked it. What the devil was he to do? He couldn't send her back, not before he'd had a talk with his mother, that was clear.

"Where's your luggage?"

"I've only got this case."

His eyes fell on a rather large papier-mache case she was carrying.

"Well, come along then, the car's waiting," said Cleeve, taking charge of her case, and then quickly entering the car they drove away.

Cleeve gave rein to his thoughts. He would have to talk things over with his father again. They could not send her away at once, not very well, for as he plied her with questions, he realised what the appointment meant to her. Among other things she had been given to understand that if he were elected the appointment would probably be permanent.

"My name is Barrington, not Harrington," he said in answer to one of her remarks.

"I'm sorry," she apologised. "I don't often make mistakes, you know." And then, thinking from his manner that he was none too pleased at that mistake, she added, as if to convince him of her worthiness: "At any rate, my last employer was very pleased with me." She opened her handbag and drew out a testimonial, which she handed silently to Cleeve.

Miss Winifred Ellis has been in our employ for the past two years. She joined as a copying clerk and has, during the last six months, acted as confidential shorthand typist, in which capacity she has thoroughly justified the confidence we reposed in her. She is extremely accurate and reliable, and nothing but our straitened financial circumstances and the liquidation of the firm due to excessive taxation would have induced us to part with her. She bears a most excellent character and her self-sacrificing devotion to her invalid mother is so well known to us that we commend this fact to any prospective employer.

THOMPSON, SIMPSON AND JONES,
General Merchants.

The open pride which she took in this testimonial was so indicative of her trusting naïveté that Cleeve's resolve suffered another shock, but a woman secretary was really unthinkable! He'd have to talk to his mother pretty seriously about it. He could deal with a man, but how on earth could he say to this trusting, frail-looking child who had suffered from the buffeting of adversity: "Look here, this is all tosh," or "Look here, this is sheer damned piffle," as was his wont when reading letters of which he didn't approve. It was with his mind still in this state of indecision that the car drew up and he saw his father coming to meet them.

"Well, Cleeve, my boy, I see you've not sent her away, ha! ha! Thought you would change your mind when you saw her. Got persuasive little ways, eh?"

Cleeve was dumbfounded. Had his father gone off his head? And without vouchsafing a word he descended from the limousine and handed out his companion.

"Good God! What's the meaning of this?"

"This is the secretary you appointed, sir." Cleeve spoke in a cold voice of reproof. "Let me introduce you."

But Col. Barrington was too dazed to put out his hand. He stood there with eyes which wandered from the bobbed hair to the transparent silk stockings and back to the bobbed hair again, and then he found his tongue.

"I didn't engage her. I didn't engage any fly-by night!"

"Well, I engaged this lady," Cleeve returned in a voice quivering with suppressed indignation. "And I resent your epithet, sir."

He had given the girl a furtive glance and had seen the tears in her eyes, the agony of her expression.

"I don't understand! Is it a hoax?" She whispered the words to herself, almost inaudibly, but they were not lost to Cleeve's quick ears.

"No hoax at all, Miss . . . I didn't catch your name?" responded Cleeve, who unfortunately had not paid particular attention to the name on her testimonial.

The girl was thinking hard. They didn't even know her name? Then it was a hoax, after all. Well, she must be brave.

"I didn't catch your name?" Cleeve reiterated insistently.

"Ellis; Winifred Ellis."

"Let me introduce my secretary, father, Miss Ellis."

But Col. Barrington still refused his hand; his eyes were fixed on an approaching car, which he recognised as belonging to the Station Hotel. It would have been difficult to say who was the more astonished, Col. Barrington at the new secretary, or Cleeve as the second car drew up and Yvonne jumped lightly out.

"What's all this, Cleeve?" Yvonne demanded, their first greetings over, taking in at a glance the tragedy of shattered hopes reflected on the little secretary's face. The latter had re-obtained possession of that cheap-looking case and Yvonne noticed its worn appearance. Yvonne noticed more than this . . . the poor quality of her clothes. And, woman-like, she ascribed to its true cause the transparency of her stockings; they, too, were cheap, and that was why the girl had bought them. As for the bobbed hair, it meant nothing, surmounting such a face. For some unaccountable

reason Cleeve made no reply to Yvonne's remark. The little secretary had, meanwhile, put down her case and was opening her handbag. Slowly she withdrew a telegram which bore traces of constant fingering; and in truth it had been opened time and again and perused and replaced in the bag, only to be taken out again and re-read; it looked as if it had been in existence as many months as it had been hours. . . .

Major Lowther offers you temporary post as secretary provided you can join at once. Chance of permanency if re-elected. Come by four-twenty from Paddington for preliminary interview. Train will be met.

HARRINGTON.

"I'm afraid a little joke of mine has miscarried, Yvonne," Col. Barrington began diffidently. "I didn't tell Cleeve I had asked you to come down to help him with his secretarial work, and he objected so strongly to a lady secretary that I let him meet the train, fully expecting you would soon be able to change his mind. But I can't understand what he means by bringing Miss Ellis here. I never communicated with her in any way."

"I think this telegram explains the mistake," Yvonne interposed, handing it to Col. Barrington, whose expression changed to one of relief when he read it.

"Oh, I see how it is . . . It's only a little mistake, my dear," he said in a voice which made up for his former brusqueness. "I'm sorry I was so unkind, come and have tea, for you must be tired after your journey. Afterwards I'll send you on to Mr. Harrington in the car."

He led the way into the house, glancing behind to see if the other two were following, but Yvonne had drawn Cleeve aside and they were now talking earnestly together. Col. Barrington smiled indulgently as he continued on his way, with Miss Ellis close behind.

"I wondered what you were doing at the station, Cleeve; you were so engrossed with Miss Ellis that you left me to fend for myself." There was a look of mock reproach in her eyes.

"I didn't know you were expected. I suppose it was a practical joke of the Guv'nor's but it's rather misfired!

Harrington is the Liberal agent down here and, judging by that telegram, he has offered Miss Ellis a post. I, of course, went down to the station fully intending to send my secretary back." There was a twinkle of enjoyment in his eyes, "but I hadn't the heart when I saw that poor little thing, although the bobbed hair and stockings very nearly precipitated matters!"

"Can't you see she's poor, Cleeve, as poor as she can be? . . . And poor people haven't time to go in for elaborate hairdressing, and they buy transparent stockings because no one wears them nowadays and they're very cheap. I like her, Cleeve, and after all I'm no use as a secretary."

"I never thought you would be! I think I want a man, really, don't you, dear?"

"No, I don't," Yvonne shook her head decidedly. "You're going to have Miss Ellis."

Cleeve looked at her teasingly. "Now, Yvonne, you're not going to start bossing me so soon, are you? Besides, I can't have her; she's going to work for Major Lowther."

"I'm not so sure about that. Let's drive over to Mr. Harrington's and see what we can do."

"And what about tea? You're tired, Yvonne dear, you must be!"

"Never mind tea, the car's here and the tea can wait. I believe in striking while the iron's hot."

"You're the only woman I know who is thoroughly consistent with her beliefs," Cleeve murmured admiringly, "but do have tea first."

"I've had a cup of tea on the train and I'd rather settle this first."

* * * * *

Later, when they returned, they found Col. Barrington doing his best to entertain Miss Ellis, and apparently succeeding very well.

"Well, you two have been a long time. The tea's cold, you'd better ring for more, Yvonne, my dear. What a lot you must have had to talk about, eh?"

"We've been to Mr. Harrington's," Yvonne announced calmly, "and he has no objection to Cleeve claiming Miss Ellis' services. It appears one of the committee of the Liberal Association knows your mother," she looked smil-

ingly at Miss Ellis, who seemed strangely comforted by the warmth and sincerity of the smile, "and he persuaded Major Lowther to give Miss Ellis the offer, though personally Major Lowther favoured a local candidate. Anyway, the result is that Mr. Harrington has no objection to your working for Mr. Barrington."

"I'm very glad to hear that," said Col. Barrington enthusiastically. "I think Miss Ellis will make an excellent secretary. You'll excuse an old man being a little put out at the mistake, won't you?"

Miss Ellis nodded her head shyly.

And so it came about that Winifred Ellis took up her residence at Longton Hall, and played no insignificant part in the hastening of the storm clouds which were, unknown to Cleeve Barrington, already gathering round him.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE Town Hall was crowded to overflowing when Cleeve Barrington arrived fifteen minutes before the time appointed for the opening of his first political meeting.

As he advanced towards the platform his progress was interrupted by well-wishers pressing round, anxious to offer him personal congratulations and shake his hand.

His entry had been signalled by a great cheer, not, however, unmingled with a few boos and hisses, which Cleeve's sharp ears were not slow to detect.

Those boos and hisses were heard, however, by other ears than Cleeve's, and it was eloquent of the good-fellowship which existed in that agricultural constituency between the landed class, the tenantry and the labourers that those manifestations of disapproval acted like a rallying call. Men and women left their seats with one accord, as though anxious to dissociate themselves as soon as possible from any hostile demonstration, and the crowd round Cleeve soon became so great that he had literally to fight his way with hand-shakes and good-humoured banter to the platform.

Twice he had almost reached it, only to be dragged back again. It was an ovation he had not expected, and a tribute to his total absence of condescension in all his dealings with those who were not so favoured by fortune as he was. It was a tribute to his eagerness to play in the local cricket or football teams whenever his services were required; a tribute to a man who could hold his own, with any of them, in the pursuits and sports of the countryside, and an expression of appreciation for a man always and ever a good winner and chivalrous loser.

His very recklessness, which was deplored by so many of his friends, was to those country folk a gift of the gods, and an ever-recurring topic of conversation and amusement. If

Longfield had made 120 runs for six wickets Cleeve Barrington usually went in and made a duck, and then and there walked back to the wooden structure which did duty as a pavilion with the air of one who had had full value out of that slog at a straight and well-pitched ball. If Longfield had six wickets down for twenty-two runs Cleeve Barrington went in, and, in nine cases out of ten, hit out like one possessed; probably scoring off his own bat something like sixty runs in little more than half as many minutes.

These things count in a country town, and his popularity was such that it was not until his third attempt to gain the platform that Cleeve looked like succeeding. Suddenly his attention was attracted to a small thin hand, whose owner was hidden in the crush behind. Cleeve made an attempt to grip it, but as his hand closed he found his fingers tightening on a slip of paper, and himself dragged back into the vortex of the throng. Quickly transferring the note to his waistcoat pocket without making any attempt to read it, he made one more effort to mount the steps, and a second later found himself on the platform, receiving the congratulations of his active supporters.

“Fine meeting you’re going to have, Cleeve!” said Col. Cartwright, who, in Admiral Travers’ enforced absence abroad, owing to illness, was acting as chairman to the Conservative Association. “I think we’d better make a start, as I shouldn’t be at all surprised if you have to address an outside meeting from the steps. There are more outside than in; I’ve never seen the town so excited!”

Cleeve had barely nodded his assent when Col. Cartwright held up his hand for silence.

Although it was not the first meeting Cleeve had addressed he was not free from nervousness, for those boos and hisses had not been entirely forgotten, and, moreover, it was the first meeting he had addressed on his own behalf. He had never had much difficulty in making a speech, but it was easier to advocate another’s claims than his own. “Much easier,” he said to himself, “to tell his fellowmen what a fine chap Mr. So-and-So was than to get on his hind legs and blow his own trumpet.”

“Ladies and Gentlemen:

“We are here to-night for the express purpose of assuring

Mr. Cleeve Barrington that the Conservatives of this constituency are with him in the coming election. If the packed state of this hall is eloquent of the support you are prepared to give him, I should say there is no doubt of the popularity of our local candidate; but an even greater number has been unable to obtain admission and, with your permission, I propose that we should make these proceedings as brief as possible, in order that Mr. Barrington may have an opportunity of saying a few words to those outside, before it gets too late."

"Hear, hear!" was the hearty response of the front rows, but from the back came the unanimous retort: "We don't want to hear him!"

Immediately, right at the back, a man stood up whom no one on the platform recognised. The people in front instinctively turned round to gain a view of him as he shouted his remarks in a penetrating voice:

"We don't want to 'ear Mr. Barrington or any other damned capitalist. What abaht 'ouses?"

Before he finished speaking another man took up the running, and in an even more penetrating voice shouted:

"Look 'ere, we don't want no nonsense over this 'ere general Hillection; we want to know if you're going to make this country fit for 'eroes to live in. The likes of Mr. Barrington, and the rest of you blooming lot of parasites on the platform, have ground down the working man until 'e's turned; and we ain't feeding no more on sugar-coated lies—we've 'ad enough!"

Then a third man joined in, but in the pandemonium of noise he appeared to be giving vent to nothing but spasmodic, vituperative expletives.

In vain the chairman pleaded for silence, in vain someone in front demanded that the intruders be "pinched by their blinking noses and led out of the 'all!" Followed hisses and groans, accompanied by derisive laughter as Col. Cartwright appealed for fair play, and then a shrieking virago stood up on a chair and in a shrill, piercing voice shouted:

"Fair play! None o' yer mealy mouthed words is any blarsted use now! Time's past for that sort of bloody rot to go down 'ere!"

“My good woman!” The chairman’s stentorian voice could now be heard above the din. “I appeal to you as an Englishwoman to give us a fair——”

This was the signal for another outburst from the back of the Hall. It was also the signal for the supporters of Cleeve Barrington to raise their voices. The situation was fast becoming ugly.

There were hurried consultations on the platform, but Cleeve took no part in them; he sat silently waiting for an opportunity to intervene, and somehow he felt confident that when the opportunity arose he could restore order.

With the first sign of concerted action from the rear of the Hall every vestige of his nervousness had disappeared. He had come quite prepared to find men present, and even women, who in the matter of politics did not see eye to eye with him; quite prepared for unmerciful heckling, hoping to give as good as he received; but not for one moment had he anticipated the possibility of such heat, and the coolness which often comes to reckless, impulsive natures in a critical hour was his. “He would give them three minutes more,” he thought, and, pulling out his watch to take the time, something fluttered to the ground.

It was the note that had been thrust into his hand; he bent down, picked it up and opened it. It was in the handwriting of Winifred Ellis.

“The back of the Hall has been packed with a rowdy element and the leader has a seat on my left.”

He read the message twice and then, looking over the sea of faces, his eyes travelled from row to row, scanning them carefully until it rested on the pale immobile face of his secretary. On her left sat Michael Tennant, his cynical eyes staring through narrowed slits into Cleeve’s own with malevolent amusement lurking in their depths, and then, as though he had been waiting for that exchange of glances, Michael Tennant slowly raised his hand.

Immediately, the crowd at the back rose to its feet, red flags and banners appeared as suddenly as if they had descended like rain from the clouds, and the opening verse of the “Red Flag” thundered through the Hall.

Col. Cartwright leant over, scribbled a hurried note and, handing it to Cleeve, who was sitting on his right, said in a

hoarse whisper: "Get someone to take this to the police station at once."

Cleeve took the note, read it, shook his head and, tearing the note up quite calmly, threw the pieces on the floor just as the verse ended. Then, in the pause which followed, Cleeve Barrington rose to his feet, his eyes still on Michael Tennant, who, caught in the act of raising his hand again, was giving the pre-arranged signal with his followers to rush the Hall.

But there was something in the look on Cleeve Barrington's face that momentarily arrested everyone's attention. For one fraction of a second he held that Hall mesmerised, and in the stillness which followed he slowly and with uncanny calmness, advanced to the steps. Those who saw his face, and they were everyone without exception in the body of that Hall, were aware of only one thing—the look on that face. He was descending the steps, he was walking down the Hall, slowly and deliberately. There was no trace of haste, no trace of recklessness. On the contrary Cleeve walked as calmly, as coolly, as if he had been alone. Walked past row after row, until he came to that in which Tennant was sitting.

With an inclination of the head he indicated that Tennant should leave the Hall.

The only response Michael Tennant made, was to shrink back in his chair, an act which his paid hirelings interpreted as evidence of extreme cowardice. In that second they felt they had lost their leader, and with that knowledge their enthusiasm for their task completely evaporated.

There was something too ominous in the silence; too ominous in that look on Cleeve's face for Tennant, or anyone else, to move. The absence of motion was fatal. The next instant Michael Tennant felt his throat pinioned in a vice-like grip and then the calmness of Cleeve left him and the grip tightened. With diabolical hate stirring his whole being, he saw the veins knot on his enemy's forehead; saw his face turn from scarlet to blue, saw, with frenzy in his eyes, the futile attempts which Tennant made to tear away that grip, and then, as though moved by a sudden impulse, Cleeve Barrington released his grip and, lifting up the al-

most inanimate form of Michael Tennant, carried him to the door.

Releasing his hold Cleeve saw, to his astonishment, Michael Tennant in the act of falling; he was not aware of the strength of that pressure which he had exerted on the man's throat, and his left hand shot out quickly to regrip him before he fell, but the effort came too late. Tennant had fallen and then, before Cleeve could pick him up, he managed to regain his feet and stumbled out of the room.

CHAPTER XXXVII

“**I** SUPPOSE you’re very pleased with your meeting last night, Mr. Barrington!”

Cleeve turned to face the speaker, whose smooth, cynical voice he had already recognised as that of Michael Tennant.

“I’ve no wish to discuss this matter with you, and I don’t intend to. I’m well aware of the underhand methods blackguards like you adopt!”

“And I’m well aware of your methods.”

“Hope you are; they’re effective, and that’s all I care about.”

Tennant gave a derisive laugh. “The methods of a bully generally are, that is, at first. But might is not right, Cleeve Barrington, not even in Longfield. Bullies get their deserts in the end, and I’ll see you pay the uttermost farthing for treating me as you did.”

“There were others who would have treated you more roughly if I had not interfered; I should have thought you’d have learnt that by now.”

“There’s only one thing I’ve learnt, and that is, bullies don’t go for men of their own size. Oh yes, you can wince, Cleeve Barrington! But I’ve never heard of you laying your hands on a man your own size.”

“For the simple reason, Tennant, that I’ve never found any other man my size, or less, who has such a low-down scheming mind as you. I don’t find them working in the dark and getting paid hirelings to interrupt political meetings. It’s only mean worms like you who do that sort of thing. Even the country’s interests are subordinated to your cowardly personal spite. But you came to the wrong place this time. Longfield likes fair play, and even paid hirelings sometimes have a sense of it, as you found to your cost. If you hadn’t deserved what you got they would never have deserted you as they did. Even in their half-

drunk state they saw your mean, dirty soul. Oh, yes, I know you filled them up with whisky and spouted to them in that low-class public house run by your friend, Heineman, an out and out Bolshevik."

Cleeve rode on, not at all satisfied with his part in the conversation. He somehow felt it lowered him to argue with such a man, lowered him almost as much as it lowered him to lay his hands on such a contemptible, scheming blackguard; and he felt an added sense of shame because he had so often resolved that never again would he speak to or touch Michael Tennant, but somehow the minute he saw his cynical face or heard his taunting words that irrepressible, hot blood of his drove every good resolution from his mind.

"Why can't I keep cool like other men?" he said aloud.

He reined in his horse at the cross roads. Should he go on to Hoston and see his supporters there, or take the right-hand turning to Marden? . . . But he did not decide the question, he was too agitated with what he considered his weakness in letting Tennant draw him out again.

"A damned fool, that's what I am! Why can't I restrain this temper of mine?"

"It would be better for all of us if you could, Barrington!"

Turning round in astonishment, he saw Col. Cartwright, but what caused him more surprise was the entire absence of that kindly welcome which Col. Cartwright usually accorded him.

"We haven't done with that scrap you had with Tennant. It wouldn't surprise me if he took out a summons for assault."

"I don't care if he does."

"Well, I think it's time you did, Barrington. It's no use resorting to personal force, doesn't do a candidate any good," growled Col. Cartwright.

"I'd do the same thing again; it's no use saying I wouldn't, Colonel; I lose control of myself whenever I set eyes on that blighter. It's not the first time he's played it low down, I can tell you!"

"I have heard that he was your rival for a time." There was a suspicion of superciliousness in Col. Cartwright's

voice which was quite unintentional. "But he *had* the decency to leave you a free field as far as Mrs. du Barry was concerned as soon as he saw how the land lay."

"You will oblige me, Colonel, if you refrain from referring to Mrs. du Barry and that cad in the same breath."

Col. Cartwright's anger began to rise; he had the Conservative interests to consider, not only Cleeve's, but he controlled it with an effort.

"Look here, Barrington, you've got to subordinate your own interests to the cause. I was on my way to Longton Hall to talk this matter over quietly with you, not to quarrel. I want to tell you that we have had an emergency meeting of the committee and we all think you should apologise."

"That, Colonel, I'll never do."

"Not for the sake of the cause, my boy?"

"Not for the sake of any damned cause on God's earth!"

"Cleeve, don't be impetuous; listen to me. At the time we all rather approved of what you did, but you must remember we were all more or less incensed at what we considered a hooligan outburst. You see, we've never had such scenes at Longfield before, but we must make allowances for the times. There's a terrible lot of unemployment about; agricultural labourers are getting a mere pittance to live on. And when it was all over and we had cooled down we weren't quite so sure you'd done right. No offence, Cleeve, we all lost our tempers, we're all in the same boat. But a summons for assault won't do us any good, and for the sake of the cause we all think you should . . . well . . . not quite apologise, you know, but . . . er . . . send Tennant an expression of regret."

"Col. Cartwright, I'd rather stand down than do that. I've just met Tennant and I tell you it was all I could do to keep my hands off him again. Apologise to that cur? *Never!* Not if you pleaded on your hands and knees; nor is it necessary. I know the agricultural labourer as well as you do. He may be underpaid, he may be starving, but he plays the game. He can break up my meetings as much as he likes, and I wouldn't lift a finger to stop him. Men do these things when they're underpaid and underfed, and the political agitator fires their blood. But when they

go to the poll they vote for their real friend. They know their real friend is *my* Guv'nor in these parts and they'll vote for his rotter of a son! . . . Oh, yes, I know my own shortcoming," Cleeve added hastily as Col. Cartwright showed signs of interrupting. "They know I can't control my temper at times, but they'll vote for me all the same, because they know that a Barrington with all his faults isn't going to let them down in times like these. As for apologising to Michael Tennant, the Guv'nor would rather see me dead first if he knew everything."

"That's all very well, Barrington, but this election's going to be a near thing and you must carry the Conservative Association with you. I'm afraid if you . . . er . . . I mean to say, if . . . er . . . we don't express some sort of regret, they may turn you down yet; you see, I haven't the same influence as Travers. I wish I had, and some of the members of the committee think you're entirely in the wrong."

"Turn me down? No one will turn me down."

"No one wants to, really, but you've just said you'd rather stand down than apologise to Tennant."

"So I would with a committee behind me which was loyal to me and the cause; but when it's divided in its opinion as to whether I did right or wrong I've finished with it. I'll subscribe to the policy of party before politics, but not to party before right; nor will the country, nor will Longfield, and now you've told me all this I'll not stand down and I won't apologise,—for I've no use for that effeminate expression of yours 'regret,'—not for all the Conservative Associations on earth." And having delivered himself of this challenge Cleeve Barrington pressed his heels into his horse's flanks and left Col. Cartwright, as he expressed it to himself "to chew the cud."

* * * * *

The next morning Cleeve Barrington was summoned by Elton to the library to meet Col. Cartwright again, who without waiting for any exchange of greetings handed Cleeve a copy of the *London General News*.

"Read this, Barrington. It's an awful blow. I told you yesterday we hadn't heard the last of your scrap with Tennant, but you wouldn't listen to me. You'll see I was

right after all; there was no need to take the law into your own hands, we'd soon have had enough police in the Hall to eject the interrupters, and then we'd have had the law on our side," said Col. Cartwright with no little degree of vehemence. "As it is I'm afraid the Labour press will work that theory for all they're worth," he added, pointing to the leading news column.

Cleeve glanced at the glaring headlines. . . .

MIGHT IS RIGHT IN LONGFIELD.

VOTES BY FORCE! NOT ARGUMENT!

DISORDERLY CONDUCT OF CONSERVATIVE
CANDIDATE.

EXPECTED SENSATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS.

"In another column will be found particulars of a scene which will be as nauseating to lovers of fair play as it will be to those who have supported Mr. Cleeve Barrington's candidature for the Longfield division of Buckinghamshire. It is not often we have to chronicle a case of actual assault at a public meeting, and never in our recollection has it fallen to our lot to publish details of one which reflects such little credit on the principal actor. No one more strongly deprecates the rowdy element which makes itself heard when general elections are on the tapis than ourselves. It is an element which we have never hesitated to denounce, but human nature being what it is, some allowances must be made for the high feelings which are aroused on these occasions. The Englishman, that is, the patriotic Englishman, takes the Government of his country very seriously; he is not a milk and water individual who turns with every wind that blows, and a candidate must expect the partisans of all political creeds to advocate in public meetings the views they represent with as much fervour as the candidate advocates his own. As long as these views are expressed in language befitting the occasion no objection can possibly be taken to them. Heckling plays a recognised part in all elections; but should heckling amount to obstruction, the arm of the law can be evoked to suppress it. This is the proper course to follow and the only one.

“The facts as far as the Longfield meeting is concerned make painful reading. It would appear from our correspondent’s telegraphic summary that a small band of ardent Socialists waved a few red flags and behaved more or less like exuberant schoolboys—a pardonable lapse in these times—but Mr. Cleeve Barrington, the Conservative candidate, far from showing that small degree of patience which would have enabled the common sense of the meeting to reassert itself, deliberately left the platform and assaulted Mr. Michael Tennant, a strong supporter of the Labour movement, in view of the whole meeting. Had Mr. Cleeve Barrington, who is a big, powerful man standing over six feet and an adept at what we are now tempted to call the ignoble art of the bully, contented himself with more than half throttling a man scarcely half his size, that in itself would have been contemptible enough, but such an act was apparently not enough for this ‘Lord of the Stables.’ He must needs advance the art of bullying a stage further, and deal his half-conscious victim a vicious blow just as Mr. Tennant was blindly stumbling out of the Town Hall. It is to the suddenness and viciousness of the attack that our correspondent ascribes the immunity which Mr. Barrington obtained from the meeting, otherwise we are at a loss to account for the tranquillity in which this cowardly assault was committed.

“Every honest Englishman has nothing but loathing and contempt for a bully, and it affords us no little satisfaction to be able to inform our readers that the bully, in this instance, is likely to reap a speedy retribution. We understand that this hero-of-a-candidate is engaged to a Mrs. du Barry, a girl of charming personality, great beauty and a lover of fair play, and if we are credibly informed the marriage has been fixed to take place on the day of polling. We shall be very much interested to hear what she thinks of the conduct of her bridegroom-elect. She may remain silent, but we think not; for Mr. Tennant intends to take out a summons against this trampler on English liberties, and, if we are credibly informed, one of the leading K.C.’s in London is to be briefed on his behalf. Sensational developments are expected.

“There is a strong rumour that there is a certain glass

house at Becclesfield where Mr. Cleeve Barrington has lately been staying, and we should not be surprised if in the course of the next few days the whole of Longfield is agog over a scandal which is likely to be as sensational as any scandal which has ever been threshed out in a court of law."

"What d'you say to that, Barrington?" asked Col. Cartwright with a lugubrious expression of countenance.

"Well, as far as the meeting is concerned it's an absolute distortion of facts."

"It may be, Mr. Barrington." The formality of his address was significant. "But you can't import the atmosphere of that meeting into a police court. What might appear very right and proper at a heated political meeting will appear in a very different light in the cold, unromantic legal atmosphere of the court. It wouldn't surprise me if the case is tried by the two Liberal and one Labour J. P.'s, for if Tennant has any sense he'll call all the Conservative J.P.'s who were on the platform at your meeting as witnesses."

"Well, there's nothing for it, Colonel, but to see it through."

"But what's this other scandal they hint at?"

"I prefer to say nothing at the moment."

"Is there any truth in it?"

"I can't say anything at present. When is the case to be heard?"

"We've fixed it for next Tuesday. As chairman of the Bench I thought it desirable that the case should be disposed of before next Friday."

"Why Friday?"

Col. Cartwright began to stammer a reply, but Cleeve cut him short.

"Oh, I remember now, it's nomination day, isn't it? . . . I see what you're driving at."

"Well, Barrington, you know we've got our cause to consider."

"Yes, yes, I quite understand, do what you think is expedient, and let right take care of itself," said Cleeve provocatively.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

“**W**HAT’S up, Guv’nor?” asked Cleeve, on re-entering the library a few hours later. He had been out all the morning visiting a distant committee-room and was astonished to see his father pacing the room in an agitated manner holding a copy of the *London General News* in his hand.

“My dear boy, what’s all this about?” said his father, pointing to the article which Col. Cartwright had already shown Cleeve.

“Oh, I chucked Michael Tennant out of the meeting the other night, that’s all. I didn’t tell you before because I thought it would upset you, but you can take it from me he jolly well deserved it.”

“Cleeve, don’t try to throw sand in my eyes! You know very well what I’m driving at; it’s the scandal. You don’t realise what you’ve done.”

Col. Barrington began to search through a heap of correspondence on the table and finished without finding what he was looking for.

“Damn it! Where can I have put that telegram?”

He commenced to go through the heap again, throwing the letters into the utmost disorder as he did so.

“What are you looking for? Can I help you?”

“It’s a telegram, Cleeve. Well, I’m damned if I know what I’ve done with it! Where was I standing when Yvonne gave it to me? Let me see. . . .”

“What is it about?”

“I want you to read it; it’s about Yvonne.”

“Yvonne!” Cleeve’s face paled. “What about her?”

“I want you to read it,” replied Col. Barrington obstinately. “Can’t collect my wits. What’s the good of standing about doing nothing, can’t you help me to find the damned thing?”

"Really, Guv'nor, you must calm yourself. I don't think there'll be any scandal, if that's what's worrying you. That chap Tennant's a dirty, mean dog and he won't fight. He's only put that in the paper to try and browbeat me, but when he sees I mean to go through with it, he'll sneak off like the cur he is."

Col. Barrington was not listening; his eyes had fallen on a ball of crumpled pink paper lying on the hearth and, swooping down on it, he picked it up and handed it to his son.

"Read that," he said agitatedly.

Cleeve felt his heart thumping against his chest. Something told him his assurances were idle words. The scandal already seemed to take a concrete form. That ball of crumpled paper loomed large in his mental vision. It looked like a bomb that was ready to burst and scatter his dreams, and the very thought filled him with nervous apprehension. Slowly and deliberately he unfolded it, placed it on the table and smoothed out the creases before he attempted to read. Then he picked it up and walked over to the window, turned his back to the light and began to read. It was addressed to Mrs. du Barry. . . .

"Inform Cleeve marriage cannot possibly take place. Have written Col. Barrington. Return at once. My decision final. Let Cleeve know there can be no interviews."

He read and re-read the telegram, hardly believing his eyes and then in a strained voice he demanded: "Where is she? I must see her at once!"

"She's gone."

"Gone!" Cleeve repeated the word in a dull mechanical voice.

"Yes, she left about half an hour ago, after seeing this article in the *London General News*."

"That article! Why on earth did you show it to her? Couldn't you wait until you had consulted me? Do you think it's fair?" he demanded with added bitterness.

"I didn't show it to her, Cleeve." There was reproach in Col. Barrington's voice as he quietly faced his son. "She received the paper this morning with that scurrilous

article outlined in blue pencil. She showed it to me when she handed me the telegram."

"Well, I'm going to Becclesfield."

"Oh, don't do anything rash, Cleeve!"

There was a knock at the door, and Elton entered with a letter, bearing the Becclesfield postmark, which had just come in by the afternoon's post.

Father and son were standing side by side, Cleeve, being nearest the door, took the letter from the tray.

"No, Cleeve, the letter is for me. It's from Mr. du Barry, he and I used to be great friends and there may be things in it he wouldn't want you to see." Cleeve passed the letter to his father, who walked away a few paces and read the letter in silence. Then, before Cleeve could utter a word of protest, he had torn it into fragments and thrown it on the fire.

"I'm afraid, my boy, there's nothing to be done. I referred a few minutes ago to the scandal hinted at in that paper and I tell you that behind that threat lies a very concrete case. I knew of the mystery about Yvonne before she was born, and in that letter Mr. du Barry tells me that Michael Tennant knows of it too. He has been to Becclesfield and made certain proposals to Mr. du Barry. He will withdraw the case at a price, the price of his marriage to Yvonne, and if it doesn't take place he threatens to have the whole scandal probed into by the court. Mr. du Barry says Tennant is absolutely determined about it. Meanwhile the matter remains, so to speak, *sub judice* until Yvonne reaches Becclesfield, when he hopes to write again."

"I'm going to Becclesfield, father, I must!"

"How can you? Do listen to me. In the first place it's no use your going." He spoke very quietly for inasmuch as Cleeve's impetuous nature was aroused, the Colonel's became calm but alert. He scented that any undue haste and recklessness on his son's part would only tend to further complications; and the imperative necessity of preventing Cleeve going to Becclesfield had banished for the moment the blow which his pride had received as a result of Col. Cartwright's hint that another candidate might have to be found.

"Not a bit of use your going," he continued. "Mr. du Barry has made it quite clear in his letter that he would regard an attempt on your part to force an interview as an unwarrantable intrusion at this stage, and you'd find the door closed against you."

"Do you think that would stop me?"

"I know it wouldn't, but your commonsense will. You don't know Mr. du Barry, I do. Just before Yvonne was born he disappeared from society without leaving a trace of his whereabouts."

Cleeve had shown signs of paying little attention to his father's words, but the latter remark impressed him.

"And, Cleeve, he would take Yvonne with him this time. The girl loves you, but rush your fences and you fall. Your ties on Yvonne are silken threads compared to the ropes which bind an only daughter to her father after so many years of affection and daily intercourse."

"You don't know Yvonne; you insult her and you belittle me!"

"I do nothing of the sort. I've no doubt that you two, when, and if, you come together . . . I can't help saying if . . . will strengthen the ties until they hold like steel chains, but for the moment you can be sure that Mr. du Barry has the greater influence. You cannot break the influence of a lifetime in a few weeks, and, moreover, Mr. du Barry has a certain hold over her which I am not at liberty to discuss. Rush your fences and you'll find Mr. du Barry will spirit himself away and take Yvonne with him. Besides, Cleeve," he added quickly, desirous of taking advantage of the hesitation which Cleeve evinced, "you can't desert your post here. It would be rank disloyalty to the Party which has so far given you its confidence."

"Gave!"

"No, Cleeve, it still does, and it's your duty to stick to your post. And another thing, Yvonne told me she hoped to write to you to-night, and isn't it better to wait here quietly for that letter instead of rushing off to Becclesfield? . . . You can't do it, Cleeve, not after that reference to the glass house. Everyone will know where you've gone, for you're more or less a public man now, and it wouldn't be doing

Yvonne any good to take a step which would give people's tongues more cause for gossip."

"I'm going!" Cleeve declared obstinately.

"Well, here's a letter for you from Yvonne. She wrote it after I'd done my best to persuade her to stay until your return."

With nervous twitching fingers Cleeve tore open the letter. . . .

MY OWN DEAR CLEEVE,

I'm just heartbroken to leave you without saying goodbye, for there's only a few minutes to catch the train. Something terrible has happened, but I'll try to write you to-night. Whatever happens remember I'm yours, and I'll never, never marry anyone else.

Your heartbroken,

YVONNE.

P.S.—With your father's permission I'm taking Miss Ellis with me; he thinks it better for you to have a man secretary after all.

Cleeve read the letter, hastily thrust it into his breast pocket, and in a calm voice repeated: "I'm going."

"But you can't get to Becclesfield to-night."

"Oh, yes, I can . . . I'll motor there!"

CHAPTER XXXIX

“I’M SO glad you’ve come, Cleeve. Now, sit down, I’ve a lot to talk to you about. . . . Whatever have you been doing?”

“I’ve been to Becclesfield.”

“Yes, I know. That’s why I asked you to come.”

“Who told you?”

“Well, I partly guessed. You see, everyone knows you’ve been away,” said Mrs. de Haviland. “And so,” she continued, “I put two and two together. I think it was very foolish of you. Why didn’t you come and see me first? But even if I hadn’t guessed I suppose you realise that everything you do gets into the papers? Look at this.” She rose from her chair and, going over to the writing-table, took therefrom the current copy of the *London General News* and handed it to Cleeve. Once again the big headlines caught his eye. . . .

THE GLASS HOUSE AT BECCLESFIELD.

IS OUR PROPHECY COMING TRUE?

CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE LEAVES HIS POST.

Our correspondent at Becclesfield wires: “Mr. Cleeve Barrington, the Conservative candidate for the Longfield division of Buckinghamshire, arrived here in the early hours of yesterday morning, having travelled by motor car during the night, and is staying for the time being at the ‘George Hotel.’ I called on him about breakfast-time and asked him if he could give me any information with regard to the case which Mr. Michael Tennant is bringing in the Longfield police court; if there was any truth in the report that it would be productive of sensational developments, and if he were so sure of his success at the poll that he could afford to leave the constituency at such a time. His gentlemanly

reply was to tell me to 'Go to the devil.' Having no wish to expedite my introduction to his Satanic Majesty, I thought it wiser to terminate the interview, and later hired a car and journeyed to Mill House. I found Mr. Barrington who had evidently preceded me, engaged in a heated conversation with the gatekeeper. The latter was trying to convince Mr. Barrington that he was a truthful man. Mr. Barrington, apparently, was not prepared to admit this, for an assurance that the family had made a hurried departure fell on deaf ears, and it was not until he had forced his way into the privacy of the grounds and found the house bolted and shuttered and in charge of a foreign-looking major-domo that he was convinced of the fact that he would have saved himself much physical effort and mental strain, to say nothing of what may be termed 'sporting expletives,' if he had taken the old gatekeeper's word for it.

"I ventured to ask the gatekeeper if his *amour propre* had not been outraged by this scion of aristocracy, but I don't think he understood the remark. He only grinned from ear to ear and showed me a treasury note, which he assured me had been *thrust* into his hand.

"I found in Becclesfield as much interest being taken in the coming trial as is the case at Longfield, and considerable astonishment that the du Barrys have left suddenly for an unknown destination. The gossip in the town itself is entertaining, some assert that Mrs. du Barry has a lunatic husband, others that she was never married, while others again, equally confident, affirm that Yvonne du Barry is old Mr. du Barry's wife, and not his daughter, as previously reported. Mr. Michael Tennant leaves for Longfield this afternoon. He tells me his enquiries are complete, and one of the most honoured names in Longfield will be involved in the washing of the soiled linen which must unfortunately, but necessarily, take place at the coming trial. 'To what name does Mr. Tennant refer?' and 'Is the person who bears that name a man or woman?' . . . These are the questions which I should like to be in a position to answer. But Mr. Tennant refuses to say any more at present, and so I suppose we must be content to leave to the day of the trial the revelations thereof."

"What a damned confounded rag! I never thought that even a Labour paper could descend so low as not to pay some attention to the rules of the game!"

"Am I intruding, Mrs. de Haviland?"

"Not at all, Col. Cartwright. I'm glad you've come; I was just showing Mr. Barrington this morning's *London General News*. He's just come back from Becclesfield."

"And I was saying . . ."

"Yes, I heard you, Mr. Barrington," interrupted Col. Cartwright. "Really, this trial's getting on my nerves; I shall be glad when it's over. But the Labour Party's not the only Party that have members who can't play the game. The Rev. Mr. Ryder has just written to say he cannot appear on our platform any longer."

"Ahem! . . . Am I intruding, Mrs. de Haviland?"

"Not at all, Mr. Ryder. We were just speaking about you. That is . . ."

"I was speaking about you," interposed Col. Cartwright. "Fact of the matter is I've only just received your letter, and what with the trial and people like yourself, Mr. Ryder, leaving the ship I'm afraid I'm a little out of patience with everybody. I didn't mean any offence," he added hurriedly; "a rather forcible way, perhaps, of expressing my dissatisfaction with your action in leaving us, so to speak, when the case is *sub judice*, but I meant nothing more than to express my disapproval."

"I would like to accept your word for that, sir, but there is a great deal of difference between expressing dissatisfaction and the charge of not playing the game. The latter suggests something underhand and is a most unwarrantable suggestion as far as I am concerned," said the Rev. Mr. Ryder with some heat. "You will excuse my vehemence, Mrs. de Haviland, but I have my frock to protect. I wrote you, Colonel, very fully, giving the reasons for my decision. Am I to understand that those reasons carry no weight with you?"

"Mr. Ryder, I shall be very sorry if any words of mine spoken in the heat of the moment should be responsible for a somewhat distasteful discussion in Mrs. de Haviland's presence. There are two sides to every question, and I'd like to present mine, if you will allow me, later on."

Mrs. de Haviland made a slight movement, which was responsible for the eyes of the company being instantly turned in her direction.

"I should not like any friends of mine to leave my house less friendly disposed towards one another than when they came, and I think Col. Cartwright wouldn't have mentioned anything about playing the game if the words had not, so to speak, been put into his mouth." There was a quiet but commanding dignity in Mrs. de Haviland's bearing. She was looking steadfastly at Mr. Ryder as she spoke, for she realised the deep sense of injury which was responsible for his indignation and the imperative necessity of allaying it at once. "For Cleeve Barrington's sake it must be done," she said to herself, and instinctively she knew it could only be done by encouraging Mr. Ryder to talk. . . . "Talking," she always told herself, "is woman's prerogative in a calm atmosphere, but man's safety valve in a storm," and she was well aware of the dangerous and permanent nature of pent-up anger.

"I think I'll come and sit by you, Colonel." Mrs. de Haviland rose from her chair to join him on the chesterfield, for she also knew the sobering effect such a manœuvre would have on Col. Cartwright; she, however, continued speaking as she rose. "I had just shown Mr. Barrington an article in the *London General News* and he rather put the expression into Col. Cartwright's mouth."

"I don't quite understand." There was a note of perplexity in Mr. Ryder's voice, for which Mrs. de Haviland gave a hardly noticeable sigh of relief. "My strategy is succeeding," she said to herself, "for nothing so undermines anger or indignation as a change of objective."

"It was really Mr. Barrington who first spoke of not playing the game." And as she finished this sentence Mrs. de Haviland noticed with alarm that Mr. Ryder's indignation had changed to anger, his whole countenance bore evidence of it as he glared at Cleeve. Then soft and soothing came the words: "You see, Mr. Ryder, we've not seen your letter yet."

Mr. Ryder suffered another check. Was it just to be angry with one who did not know the reasons for his de-

cision? And almost before he was aware of it he found himself explaining those reasons.

“Then I must tell you. . . . As you all know, I have never taken any active part in politics, my sympathies are, and always have been, on the side of law and order—only other words for civilisation and discipline. The absence of discipline in Labour politics appals me. I may be wrong, but I hold firmly to the opinion that the extreme Labour creed is an open invitation to the youths of this country to throw off the harness of restraint. It is an alluring proposition and is as welcome to youths as an invitation would be to a young ox to throw off its yoke and roam the world. It is the doctrine of might being right in another form, and until Labour occupies a position of greater responsibility and lesser freedom my inclinations are to fight it tooth and nail. Untrammelled by circumstances, I should throw in my lot with the Liberal Party, but it is a house divided against itself. I realise that I must be as subservient to discipline and duty as the flock in my charge, and a Party like the Liberal Party without discipline has for the moment ceased to appeal. It was my sense of duty and discipline which prompted me to give open support to Mr. Barrington and the Conservative cause. Moreover, he was engaged to my daughter, and the possibility that some of my parishioners might ascribe a sinister motive to the breaking off of the engagement, determined me, as an act of justice, to combat such a possibility in the only way I could—by appearing side by side with Mr. Barrington on the platform. I have, however, my flock to consider, and as I told Col. Cartwright, the contents of a letter which I have been shown have created in my mind considerable doubt as to the wisdom of my previous decision, and, in the circumstances, I begged Col. Cartwright to excuse my reluctance to give Mr. Barrington my active support, at any rate for the present. Is there any failure on my part to play the game when my conscience raises real doubt?”

Mr. Ryder's indignation had seemingly disappeared, but a little resentment still remained, and more in sorrow than in anger he looked at Cleeve as he finished speaking, as though, in spite of strong evidence to the contrary, he was prepared to preserve an open mind.

"My remarks about playing the game were not in reference to any action of yours, sir. They were directed against this scurrilous article," said Cleeve, directing attention to the newspaper in his hand, "but I feel as Colonel Cartwright feels, that the withdrawal of your support, of which I've only just heard, is a serious blow. I appreciate your position as a clergyman, but is it right or proper to prejudge the result of the trial?"

"Mr. Barrington, I am not in the habit of prejudging anyone."

"But you have prejudged me."

"Are you aware, sir, that your own gamekeeper is going to give evidence against you?"

"Bilton give evidence against me?"

"Yes! It was not until I had had a talk with Bilton that I decided to write my letter."

"Bilton give evidence against me?" Cleeve repeated dazedly. "Why, he wasn't at the meeting!"

"What happened at the meeting has not influenced me, it is the motive, if any, which lies behind your actions, Mr. Barrington."

"What do you mean?"

"I think, sir, I may be permitted to ask you a question. . . . Has your engagement to Mrs. du Barry been broken off?"

"What's that got to do with you?" Cleeve demanded angrily.

"Only this, Mr. Barrington. . . . That if there's any truth in the rumour that Mrs. du Barry has broken off the engagement, and," Mr. Ryder paused impressively and then continued in a deliberate voice, "if it is true that she has given you no reason for breaking it off, does it not strike you that I am not the only one who can be accused of prejudgment?"

Cleeve had no immediate reply, he was too dumbfounded. Mr. Ryder's words had set him thinking hard. Was there some reason other than what he thought for the broken engagement? The promised letter from Yvonne had never arrived; that, in itself, was very significant; and now he recalled that the reason for her taking Miss Ellis away, "so that he could have a man secretary," appeared in-

adequate. What had Bilton against him? For nothing less than a strong resentment could account for such a faithful servant turning traitor. That he had turned traitor Mr. Ryder's words left no doubt. What had caused it? He could think of nothing he had said or done which might help to solve the riddle, and slowly, like one awakening from sleep, the full significance of those articles in the *London General News* dawned upon him. There was behind the barely veiled words some terrible scandal. A scandal which, in Cleeve's present state of complete ignorance, he somehow sensed could not possibly be mentally exaggerated beyond the boundaries of reality. He had been a fool to accept Mr. du Barry's condition that he should in no way attempt to ascertain the reasons which had originally stood in the way of his engagement, and now he was left to grapple alone and in open court with a scandal of which he was utterly ignorant. Then like a flash the stupefying effect of these thoughts vanished and his alertness of mind returned. Why should he remain in entire ignorance when Mr. Ryder knew something?

"Mr. Ryder, I will not have aspersions cast on Mrs. du Barry! Your insinuation that she has prejudged me is an abominable insult, and I would ask you to withdraw that remark."

"Quietly, my young friend, quietly! I made no aspersion about her. I brought her name into the conversation because if you love her," there was the slightest suspicion of contemptuous disdain in his voice as he uttered the word 'love,' "and have as high an opinion of her character as I now have, I thought you yourself would only too readily exonerate her of any charge of the kind, and in so much you might be persuaded by her example to exonerate me."

"You mean that an ordinary petty police court case of assault is a sufficient cause, in your eyes, to come here and give vent to insulting insinuations?"

"I made no insulting insinuations."

"I beg your pardon! You have talked about protecting your frock, you have also . . ."

"Not from a petty police court case of assault," interrupted Mr. Ryder with rising indignation. "Oh, no, Mr. Barrington, I am not as narrow-minded as that. I am

protecting my frock from contact with a common sordid scandal which I have good reason to believe is the *raison d'être* for the case itself."

"Mr. Ryder, will you kindly leave my house!" It was Mrs. de Haviland speaking. No one had noticed her agitation as the conversation developed, but they noticed it now. Drawing herself up to her full height, she advanced with quiet stately steps to confront the last speaker. But the agitation she was experiencing was only shown in the rigidity of her arms, the voice itself was quiet and firm. Her usually quiet, laughing eyes were hawk-like with a pride which seemed to relegate almost to insignificance the offending clergyman who faced her with a bewildered expression, an expression somewhat indicative of the loss of mental balance which her commanding words and presence had occasioned. Then, as if the fates had intended to add to the tenseness of that electrified atmosphere, in burst Col. Barrington.

"Cleeve, read that letter! What does it mean?" he demanded in the same breath. . . . "No, sir . . . no, *Cleeve*, read it aloud! True or untrue, I want everyone to know its contents!"

With the intention of refusing his father's request Cleeve's eyes travelled from the letter in his hand to his father's face. He had gleaned nothing of the contents of the letter in the hasty scrutiny he had given it, but his father's words stimulated his brain, he realised that behind the charge of assault, and in some way connected with it, was another and more sinister accusation against himself. . . . "True or untrue I want everyone to know its contents." How well he understood the meaning and intention of the words. The letter in his hand contained some damning accusation. It was of a nature which had carried semi-conviction as far as his father was concerned; and the inherent sense of justice of the Barringtons demanded that all should know the charge so that the lie, if it were a lie, of the vile scoundrel at the back of it should be known to everyone . . . or the truth, if it were the truth, be known to the world. But behind it lay another intention, and it was the knowledge of that which really stirred Cleeve's being. The intention to make it clear there and then and

in that assembly that, if true, Col. Barrington had called his son "Cleeve" for the last time.

As he looked at his father's drawn and haggard face an overwhelming desire seized him to throw his arms round his neck as he used to do when a child, but with this difference, that the influence behind the desire was a wish to protect and not claim protection. His father had suddenly become an old man, the fire in those blue eyes was replaced by a childlike appeal for comfort. Had anyone else spoken those words, so eloquent of doubt, Cleeve Barrington would have turned on his heel and been done with him for good and all; but with his father it was different, different in spite of a feeling that had his father been similarly placed he, Cleeve, would never have asked him to read aloud the accusing letter, because he, Col. Barrington's son, would have instinctively known the accusation was a lie. It was the feeling that he was doubted that caused the flush on his cheeks as he obeyed his father's demand and read aloud in firm clear tones.

DEAR SIR,

After the many years of kindness you have shown to me and my family, I am sorry to leave your service without giving the usual notice. I don't know how to tell a gentleman like you that your son destroyed my girl. I intend no insult, sir, I am only telling you the truth, and may God serve him as he served my poor girl. I have seen her last letter and it is God's truth. Please, sir, I intend no insult to you and your good lady, but Mr. Ryder told me I must write, and I don't think it would be honest to hide the truth.

Yours always respectfully, sir,

J. BILTON.

P.S.—If I have used too strong language, sir, please excuse your old servant, but if I had not seen my girl's letter written in her own hand I should not have believed it about him.

In an atmosphere of hushed silence Cleeve finished reading the letter.

"It's not true, Cleeve, is it?"

"I think, father," said Cleeve deliberately, looking at Mr. Ryder as he spoke, "I'm not called on to say whether it is the truth or a lie. You . . ."—he gave a sweep of his hand as though to include all present—"know me."

For a few moments not a word was spoken, then Mr. Ryder, who had misread that flush on Cleeve's face, left the room, followed by Col. Cartwright, now also full of doubt.

And when they had gone it fell to Mrs. de Haviland to break the heavy silence which had descended on the trio. She just drew down Cleeve's proud face and gave him a kiss which held in it a wealth of motherly affection.

CHAPTER XL

“THE case appears on the list as a simple case of assault.”

As counsel for the prosecution uttered these words in an impassioned voice the droning sounds of the court died away, as the moaning of the sea dies away when we close a window and bolt its shutters, leaving a silence so conspicuous that the words, almost inaudible at first, seemed by contrast to gather strength till they reverberated through the small court room.

“And,” continued counsel, “my client, Mr. Michael Tennant, has shown very great forbearance in steadfastly refusing to enhance the gravity of the charge; for it will transpire, in the course of the evidence which it will be my duty to produce, that, had Mr. Tennant so desired, he might have had the case heard before a higher tribunal, where a sentence could be imposed more in keeping with the viciousness of the assault than it is competent for this court to inflict.”

“I submit that my learned friend is not entitled to make such statements in his pleadings,” interposed Sir Edmund Jervis vehemently. “To dilate upon what sentence another court might or might not impose is as irrelevant to the point at issue as to expatiate on what might or might not have happened if the assault had taken place in Timbuctoo!”

“I am extremely obliged for my learned friend’s admission.” The suave, sarcastic tones of Sir John Simpson, whose staunch adherence to the Labour cause was proverbial, rang clear on every ear. “But the assault did not take place in Timbuctoo, it took place in this town, and I am here not only to prove the assault, but to earn the sympathy of the bench.”

“The sympathy of the bench has nothing to do with it,” Jervis retorted irritatingly.

“I am surprised at my learned friend’s attitude.” The suave, impassioned voice was speaking again. “And I submit I am entitled to plead for the sympathy of the bench on behalf of my client, for without that sympathy a decision of the court in my client’s favour would be a mockery! A travesty of justice! I want an expression from this court that——”

“And I submit that sympathy is quite outside any legitimate pleadings in this case,” interpolated Jervis in a challenging voice.

“I would ask your worships’ ruling on this point. These constant interruptions from my learned friend are most disconcerting.” The suavity of the voice was not so noticeable and the end of the last sentence was somewhat snappily hurled out.

Col. Cartwright, chairman of the bench, could be seen holding a whispered conversation with his colleagues as counsel for the prosecution stood steadfastly gazing in his direction with an injured expression on his countenance, an expression calculated to appeal to any Englishman’s love of fair play. Sir Edmund was also on his feet.

“This is a court of justice, not sympathy!” The note of challenge was still in his voice. “And I submit my learned friend is not entitled to——”

“We have decided to hear you, Sir John.”

This breeze had roused the interest of the crowded court. The sporting instincts of the countrymen were incited at such a beginning; it foreshadowed a keen fight. The partisans of Cleeve Barrington drew inspiration from Sir Edmund’s vehement opposition. His attitude appealed to them, he was not going to take things lying down. They felt that he would break through that scurrilous scandal which had been hinted at in the papers and lift the fog with which lying tongues and subtle insinuations had enveloped the issue. And as staunch Conservatives they argued that the Labour Party were not going to have things their own way.

But the decision of the chairman somewhat damped their feelings. Labour had won the first round of the fight; was it to be prophetic of the issue? And without knowing the whys and the wherefores they somehow sensed the impor-

tance of the decision. It was to be sensed in Sir John's look of triumph, in Sir Edmund's disappointed-looking, serious countenance as he resumed his seat. The Labour element was frankly delighted.

"I was about to say when my learned friend thought fit to interrupt me that had we liked, had we been vindictive we could have carried this case to a higher court and put Mr. Barrington on his trial at the Assizes for causing grievous bodily hurt."

"Are you going to call evidence on that point? Because if not I submit——"

"My learned friend need have no qualms on that score, for we intend to call Dr. Mornington, the family doctor of the Barringtons."

Sir John paused to bestow a benign smile on his rival. "Since the night of the assault Mr. Tennant has practically absented himself from this constituency. There is good reason for this; he has lost the sight of one of his eyes!"

At this unexpected announcement the spectators in the court stirred, craned their necks, scanned the faces round the solicitors' table, and, for the first time, became aware of Michael Tennant's absence.

Sir John paused again as if to heighten the dramatic effect of this announcement, but in reality he was concentrating for even more dramatic statements.

"When I put my client in the box his disfigurement will, I have no doubt, appal your worships, but what is more appalling is the motive which lay behind the assault. My learned friend opposed my initial efforts to elicit for my client the sympathy to which he is entitled. I am now going to give him further cause for objection in an endeavour to deprive him of any sympathy for the cause he advocates; for Mr. Tennant, notwithstanding the permanent disfigurement which he has suffered at Barrington's hands, acted in an unbelievably generous manner. He did something which not one man in a thousand would do,—nay, not one in ten thousand for the matter of that. He wrote with his own hand, with the physical and mental pain of his injured eyesight still upon him, offering to drop these proceedings, if Barrington would write him an apology, only

to get the answer, scribbled on half a sheet of notepaper 'I'll see you in hell first.' "

It was significant of the indignation which Sir John's words had produced that not a titter, not a murmur was heard in the court.

In the silence which followed this dramatic opening the rustle of Sir Edmund's silk gown could be clearly heard as he leant across the table for a whispered conversation with Cleeve Barrington, whose white, drawn face spoke more eloquently than words, while his hands clenched and twisted as he gave an affirmative nod.

And then before the spellbound court was aware of it Sir Edmund was on his feet.

"Your worships, my learned friend has in the course of his opening speech referred to matters which were quite outside my knowledge, and I crave a short adjournment for the purpose of deciding on our future course."

The attempt to suppress the cheers, which broke out simultaneously from all sides of the court, was a half-hearted one. Bench and spectators guessed the meaning of this request,—Sir Edmund intended to retire from the case. But Sir John had no intention of allowing this course at such an early stage, he had the court with him and had bigger guns to fire.

"I can give my learned friend greater cause for reconsidering the position of the defence, a defence which I understand is based on provocation, and I appeal to your worships to permit me to conclude my opening speech before allowing any adjournment," and then, barely waiting for a decision, counsel continued on a line which held even Sir Edmund spellbound.

"Barrington's defence is that my client at the meeting provoked the assault. A more infamous lie never came from the lips of even a supposed gentleman. Provocation came from my client, yes! it did," thundered Sir John, thumping the desk in front of him. "But not at that meeting. My client never uttered a word on that occasion. The evidence I shall call will prove that beyond any shadow of doubt. But he did utter words on previous occasions, and I now come to what is without exception the most painful matter I have ever had to deal with in open court,

and I am sure the bench will appreciate the difficulty and delicacy of my position. A short time ago it came to Mr. Tennant's knowledge that Barrington was endeavouring to bring about an engagement between himself and a certain lady who has recently been visiting these parts. This engagement Mr. Tennant was determined to prevent, and the reasons for his opposition reflect in the highest degree on Mr. Tennant's loyalty and uprightness. My client has a friend, a gentleman of the name of George Henry de Haviland. Mr. de Haviland is married to a lady who lives in this neighbourhood and who still bears his name. Unfortunately the marriage was not a happy one and Mr. de Haviland separated from his wife and left the country more than twenty years ago. In the course of his travels he arrived late one night at the Grand Hotel, St. Moritz, only to find that his wife was staying there under the protection of a Mr. Gerald du Barry, a cousin of hers, whom she had bigamously married, and who, by a remarkable coincidence, bore the same name as her brother, Gerald du Barry; a gentleman who emigrated to Australia about the same time and has never been heard of since. I mention this latter fact because it will be necessary for me to explain later on how it enabled Mrs. de Haviland to conceal the real relationship which exists between Yvonne du Barry and herself.

“Now, as can be readily understood, the result of Mr. de Haviland's discoveries was a very painful scene, in the course of which that gentleman at first threatened legal proceedings, but later, when it was pointed out that Mrs. de Haviland was in a certain condition, he, for the sake of the child which was then unborn, agreed to take no step to expose the scandal, subject to the strict observance of certain stipulated conditions. These were that his wife, Mrs. de Haviland, and Mr. du Barry were to separate immediately and give an undertaking not to see each other again, except in the case of the death, or anticipated death, of the expected child, and then only in the presence of others. That Mr. du Barry should have the custody of the child and that he would give his word of honour to do his utmost to prevent the child taking any step in life calculated to give publicity to Mr. de Haviland's dishonour and

Mrs. de Haviland's shame. Whether those conditions were just and proper does not concern this court. They were conditions which both Mr. du Barry and Mrs. de Haviland accepted. But what is relevant is that Yvonne du Barry was that child."

Sir John's manner of dealing with these matters was significant. His voice had been lowered, he spoke quickly, leaning towards the bench as far as he could with his hands resting on the desk in front of him, his whole attitude indicative of a desire to confine his remarks to the bench, and the bench alone. His words "Yvonne du Barry is that child" were almost whispered and so hurriedly spoken that in ordinary circumstances only the magistrates and those immediately around them would have heard. But in that court the mantle of tragedy had descended. Spellbound and stillbound, the words penetrated with the clearness of a bell to the remotest corner. A man's life was being wrecked, a woman's shame was being given to the world, a husband's dishonour broadcasted, and every single soul in that crowded court scented the culmination of the tragedy. . . . Those dives into remote history were only preliminary to further revelations, . . . the atmosphere of the court whispered it, the walls echoed it, the pained expression of the magistrates emphasised it. But more eloquent than all was Sir John's behaviour. Like one who hated an unpleasant task he had paused, paused as if to take breath, to screw himself up to complete what he had begun, and then, as if to steel his purpose, he drew himself up to his full height, gazed at an open window, passed his hand heavily across his brow and then suddenly, rapidly, continued:

"Now it will be perfectly obvious that any marriage of Yvonne du Barry would give some degree of publicity to Mr. de Haviland's dishonour. The marriage registers have to be filled in and the name, etc., of the parents entered in black and white, and out of friendship to Mr. de Haviland, Mr. Tennant promised to do his best to prevent her contemplated marriage with Barrington. To complete the story which has such a great bearing on this case, I must mention that after Yvonne du Barry was born Gerald du Barry came to this country, bringing Yvonne du Barry with him,

and it will be obvious that some plausible tale had to be invented for the child's, Yvonne du Barry's, presence. To explain that Mr. du Barry had made a secret marriage was a statement too near the truth to contemplate, and so it was arranged that he should pass himself off as Mrs. de Haviland's brother, who, so they gave out, had married abroad and who, overwhelmed at the loss of his wife, was seeking consolation in retirement. By this arrangement it was a fairly easy matter to keep the secret, seeing that Mr. du Barry has practically lived the life of a recluse ever since, that Mrs. de Haviland's brother has not been heard of for twenty years, and that the few members of the family who knew the circumstances of Yvonne du Barry's birth had very good reason to lend countenance to the deception. That, briefly, is the secret of Yvonne du Barry's birth. Mr. Tennant will tell you on oath that as soon as the agreement between Mr. du Barry, Mrs. de Haviland and her husband was reached, Mr. de Haviland disappeared again, but has kept up a spasmodic correspondence with him, and that quite recently these two friends met accidentally in Moscow. Mr. de Haviland was naturally anxious to hear the latest news about Mrs. de Haviland, and, in the course of conversation, Mr. Tennant happened to mention that according to common gossip an engagement between her niece and Barrington was imminent. It was then that Mr. de Haviland, for the first time, told Mr. Tennant of his dishonour, for up till then Mr. Tennant knew none of these things and believed, as everyone else has believed, that Mrs. de Haviland bore no relationship to his friend, but was a childless widow, and that Yvonne du Barry was her brother's child. It is unnecessary for me to burden the court with the details of the conversation which took place between my client and Mr. de Haviland. It will be sufficient for my purpose to state that as a result of that conversation Mr. Tennant was authorised to inform Barrington that a marriage with Yvonne du Barry was impossible. Mr. Tennant will tell you that on his return to England he told Barrington that in loyalty to his friend he would have to prevent the marriage, and that Barrington, the man whom I am going to expose in his true colours, told my client that he had enough

influence to hound him out of the county if he dared to interfere.

"I have already stated that I am going to expose Cleeve Barrington in his true colours, and here again another, and even more, painful task falls to my lot; for in the cause of justice it will be necessary for me to refer to a very sad episode in the family life of the Biltons. A family in comparatively humble circumstances. It is a matter of common knowledge that Maud Bilton took her own life because she was in very serious trouble. But what is not a matter of common knowledge is that Barrington, the man who would have the electors of Longfield believe he stands for the just rights of the working man, was the cause of that poor demented girl's trouble."

"It's a lie, a damned lie!" The words came ringing out of Cleeve Barrington's mouth.

The chairman leant over the desk in front of him.

"Mr. Barrington, will you kindly show more respect to this court."

There was a menace in Col. Cartwright's voice, a menace which clearly showed his antipathy to the accused.

"I am sorry, sir."

A slight hiss could be heard at the back of the court and Col. Cartwright's voice rang out again:

"If there's any more interruption from the body of the court I shall have the room cleared."

"The evidence which I shall call to prove the statement I have just made," continued Sir John, who had treated Barrington's outburst with a contemptuous expression of countenance, "is overwhelming. In the first place Mr. Tennant will state on oath that he charged Barrington with being the cause of Maud Bilton's trouble and subsequent suicide, and that Barrington horsewhipped him for what he, at the time, characterised as 'Tennant's damned interference.' I shall call Bilton, Col. Barrington's gamekeeper, as a witness of that horsewhipping. I shall also produce during the course of this trial the letter of Maud Bilton on which Mr. Tennant's charge was based.

"From that letter only one inference can be drawn. To our case as a whole there is only one possible line of defence, namely, that the assault was committed under such

grave and sudden provocation that, making allowances for human nature, it would be an act of injustice to convict. In the interest of justice I thank God we have enough evidence to smother such a defence. Provocation. Yes!" thundered Sir John, "Barrington had provocation, but it is the provocation which every scoundrel and seducer must be prepared to put up with as long as this country views their crimes with contempt and abhorrence. As for provocation at the meeting itself, my client will emphatically deny that he uttered a single word or committed any act to which any right-thinking man could possibly take objection, and in face of the corroborative evidence I shall offer on this point I challenge the defence to produce a single reputable witness to contradict us."

With those telling words Sir John Simpson resumed his seat. His opening speech was closed and he sat back in his chair, confident that his learned colleague, Sir Edmund Jervis, had only one course to adopt—to withdraw from the case.

Col. Cartwright turned towards counsel for the defence.

"I think, Sir Edmund, you desire a short adjournment?"

"If you will allow me a few minutes with my client I may be able to shorten the proceedings. I was not aware that Mr. Tennant was prepared to accept an apology."

"He was," interrupted Sir John. "He is not now."

"Nevertheless, I would appreciate a short adjournment," Sir Edmund rejoined, "that is, provided my learned friend raises no objection?"

Sir John signified his assent and Sir Edmund Jervis, followed by Cleeve Barrington, passed out of court.

CHAPTER XLI

RE-ENTERING the crowded court a little later Sir Edmund Jervis resumed his seat, and it was noticed that Cleeve Barrington did not accompany him.

“Well?” The eyes of Col. Cartwright were turned in Sir Edmund’s direction.

Sir Edmund rose to his feet. “I’m afraid the case must proceed.” There was a tone of perplexity in his voice.

Followed a stir in the court as Michael Tennant entered the witness-box with a green shade over his left eye.

He bore out Sir John’s opening statements.

“Will you swear on your oath that you never uttered a word at the meeting which could have given the slightest provocation to Barrington?”

“Most certainly. I never uttered a single word which could have given offence to anyone. In fact, I don’t think I spoke at all.”

“Will you kindly look at this letter.”

Michael Tennant took the letter which Sir John passed up.

“In whose handwriting is it?”

“Maud Bilton’s.”

“When did you receive it?”

“The morning after Maud Bilton threw herself in the pond.”

“Thank you; will you kindly hand it to me,” and then after an exchange of glances with Col. Cartwright, Sir John proceeded to read aloud:

DEAR MR. TENNANT,

By the time you get this letter I shall have paid for my sin. I have nothing to add to what I told you. I blame no one but myself,

only my love was too great. This is the last and only request I have to make, that you will forgive Mr. Barrington as I too have forgiven *all*.

MAUD BILTON.

Sir John Simpson sat down and in a court only too openly hostile Sir Edmund rose to cross-examine.

“You say you received Maud Bilton’s letter the morning after she threw herself in the pond?”

“Yes.”

“Why was it not produced at the inquest?”

“I was leaving for the Continent that morning and did not open my letters until I was in the train.”

“You could have posted it to the coroner.”

“I never thought of that. Besides, I did not want to get mixed up in it.”

“Then why get mixed up in it?”

“I didn’t.”

“I thought you admitted that you got a horsewhipping because you accused Mr. Barrington of being the cause of her trouble. Isn’t that getting mixed up in it?”

“I suppose it is,” admitted Tennant sullenly.

“Will you please read her letter carefully. . . . Does it not strike you that there is a note of familiarity in that letter?”

Tennant perused the letter, and then in an even more sullen voice replied, “Nothing undue.”

“‘This is the last and only request I have to make.’ What claim had Maud Bilton to make a last request to you?”

“I think you are reading the words of a distraught girl too literally.”

“I am very grateful for your opinion, Mr. Tennant, but we will come to that presently. Did this horsewhipping which you speak of take place before or after you received the letter?”

“Before.”

“And your contention is that because you accused Mr.

Barrington of getting Maud Bilton into trouble he struck you?"

"Yes."

"You threatened to expose him, of course."

"No."

"Then can you explain the assault? It's usually the scoundrel in these cases who gets the horsewhipping, isn't it?"

"Well, I suppose I was so insistent that Mr. Barrington lost his temper."

"He wasn't overcome with remorse?"

"No, he asked me what the devil I meant by interfering."

"What did you mean?"

"I wanted him to marry Maud Bilton."

A murmur of approval ran through the court and Col. Cartwright's demand for silence was only just in time to suppress the cheering which threatened to follow.

"How did you know she was in trouble?"

"She told me."

"What! An unmarried girl told you she was in trouble through Mr. Barrington?"

"Yes."

"What did you do?"

"I promised to see Mr. Barrington."

"You didn't tell her to consult her parents?"

"Yes, I did."

"And you naturally followed it up by discussing the matter with her father?"

"No."

"No!" Sir Edmund echoed incredulously. "Why not?"

"She implored me to keep it a secret."

"Oh! And you preferred to run the risk of a horsewhipping in your endeavour to get Mr. Barrington to marry her, rather than confide the secret to her parents and get them to act."

"I can see now it would have been better."

"Doesn't it strike you that what you have just said

points to the existence of a very great degree of familiarity between you and Maud Bilton?"

"I was her friend."

"Not her lover, by any chance?"

"No, her friend."

"The friend of a working-class girl! Have you any other girl friends in that class who confide in you?"

"No."

"Maud Bilton asks you in her letter to forgive Barrington; what had you to forgive?"

"His getting her into trouble."

"I should have thought that a matter for her forgiveness, not yours." Then, receiving no reply, counsel continued:

"I suggest that Maud Bilton knew your vindictive nature and was asking you to forgive the horsewhipping."

"I'm not vindictive. My offer to accept an apology shows that."

"And there's nothing vindictive about your dragging into this case the history of Yvonne du Barry's birth?"

"I was forced to do it to show Mr. Barrington's motive in singling me out for the assault."

This closed the cross-examination and Sir John rose to re-examine.

"Were you anything more than a friend to Maud Bilton?"

"Yes, her godfather."

"Will you explain how you came to be her godfather?"

"Her mother was my nurse, and when she asked me to be godfather to her daughter I felt it was only right to do something to repay her for her kindness and care of me."

The next witness was Dr. Mornington, who testified to the seriousness of the injury which Tennant had sustained and stated that the sight of his left eye was totally and permanently destroyed. In his opinion the injury was caused by a blow.

Sir Edmund rose to cross-examine.

"Did Mr. Tennant go to your surgery to see you, or did he call you to his house?"

"He came to the surgery."

"Which day was that?"

"The morning after the meeting in the Town Hall."

"Will you swear that it was the morning after?"

"I am not quite positive, but I'm nearly sure."

"Do you keep a diary of your patients' visits?"

"Not when they come to the surgery and pay at the time."

"Did Tennant pay at the time?"

"Yes."

"Do you enter such payment in a cash book?"

"No."

"Then you've no record to support your statement that it was the day after the meeting?"

"I'm afraid not."

After Dr. Mornington, several other witnesses were called, one and all of whom bore testimony to the ill-treatment Tennant had received, and stated that, as far as they were aware, Tennant gave no cause for the assault. Then, finally, Bilton's name was called.

He took the oath sullenly, and it was obvious he felt his position acutely, as with savage expression he gave his evidence.

He had no doubt whatever that Mr. Barrington was responsible for his daughter's trouble. His daughter would not have written like that if he hadn't been. He'd seen Barrington striking Tennant with his whip, but he left them to it, never thinking their quarrel had anything to do with his daughter.

"When did you first mention this horsewhipping?" asked Sir John.

"I saw Mr. Tennant's solicitor the other day and first told him about it."

"Why did you go to Mr. Tennant's solicitor?"

"I was sent for to identify my daughter's letter."

"A suggestion has been made in this court that Mr. Tennant was on familiar terms with your daughter. Is there any truth in that suggestion?"

"Yes, he was always friendly with her; he was her godfather."

"There was nothing improper in that friendship?"

"No."

"You are quite certain about that?"

"Positive."

“Will you give us your reasons for being so positive?”

“Well, sir, you see when I told my wife about Maud’s letter I told her I’d always had my doubts about Mr. Tennant, but as I’d nothing to go on I kept it to myself. Then the missus told me she’d known all along it was not Mr. Tennant whoever else it was, for the night before she was drowned Maud told her mother what was wrong with her. She wouldn’t say who it was, and my missus says, ‘Is it Mr. Tennant?’ and she said she wouldn’t say who it was, but it wasn’t him; it was someone else.”

“Did your wife give evidence at the inquest?”

“No, sir. She was too ill and the coroner excused her.”

“Is she prepared to give evidence in this court?”

“She’s waiting outside.”

Sir John looked towards Sir Edmund, who immediately rose and informed the court that he would accept Bilton’s account of the conversation with his wife.

“That is our case,” said Sir John.

Sir Edmund Jervis rose without any delay to open the defence.

“Before I attempt to outline our defence, your worships, I want to make it quite clear that, had this issue not been complicated with happenings which occurred previous to the assault, we might have tendered an apology, and, without troubling you with further pleading or evidence, left the matter in your hands. The case, as presented by the prosecution is, however, far removed from the one of simple assault which my learned friend, in his opening address, was at such pains to emphasise. Everyone in this court, from the bench downwards, knows that the real issue is not whether Mr. Barrington committed a justifiable assault on Mr. Tennant or an unjustifiable one. We all know the issue is infinitely greater than that. Mr. Barrington is on his trial for what to a man in his position is as precious as life.”

The words fell on a hushed court, for every single soul in that crowded room felt that counsel was only voicing his or her own feelings. Cleeve Barrington, the man they had all honoured, the man whose impetuous, lovable nature had won a place in their hearts,—a place which they could not deny him, be they Conservative, Liberal or Labour,—

was in truth fighting for what they all knew was more to him than life. It was his honour that was at stake.

As the words of Sir Edmund Jervis fell on that hushed court, its animosity momentarily melted in the flood of compassion that followed the full appraisal of the real issue. That he was guilty, every single soul now believed; that is, they believed deep down in their hearts, but the pity in them voiced a call for fair play, prompting them to recall the conviction "Guilty but justified," which they had brought with them when they entered that court, and to hope that in the end that conviction would be re-established.

"What is the case that I now have to meet?" Sir Edmund continued. "If the evidence and the pleading of the prosecution mean anything, they mean this, that my client is that contemptible of all men, a seducer and a vindictive scoundrel, and that the assault was a pre-meditated act of revenge on one who had justly accused the seducer of his crime."

Sir Edmund stopped suddenly. Three clear hoots of a motor horn could be heard, followed by the rumbling of a high powered car as with squeaking brakes it drew up in the courtyard on to which the windows of the court-room opened, and a few moments later Cleeve Barrington entered the room and took his place at the side of his counsel. The two exchanged glances, there followed a hurried, mumbled request to the bench, an affirmative nod from Col. Cartwright, and a whispered conversation between counsel and client inaudible to anyone else.

"I can't find them, Sir Edmund," Barrington whispered apologetically.

"Then I don't see how I can refer to them."

An expression akin to reproach flitted across Barrington's face as he replied: "Will no one believe in me?"

For Sir Edmund Jervis that was enough. No one knew better than he the damage he might suffer from introducing into his pleading facts which could not be proved, but that look on Barrington's face settled the matter. No guilty man could simulate such an expression; it hall-marked Barrington's honesty as far as Sir Edmund was concerned, and his professional instinct melted in the wave of human

compassion that Barrington's look had conjured. In that brief second the great K.C. had not only looked into Barrington's eyes, he had looked deep into his very soul.

At times we all do things which are foreign to our natures, and Sir Edmund Jervis did something which astonished himself even more than it astonished an astonished court, his hand found Barrington's and a grip of understanding passed between them.

"And Mrs. de Haviland," Sir Edmund demanded in a whisper.

"She's here, in the car."

Then as suddenly as he had broken off Sir Edmund resumed.

"I was saying a few moments ago that if the evidence of the prosecution means anything it means that the assault was a premeditated act of revenge. It was no act of revenge, it was an act of justice. I have no hesitation in saying that Tennant,"—the omission of Mister which Sir Edmund had previously used was not lost on the court,—
"has distorted facts to suit his own purpose. There is no lie more difficult to combat than a lie which is half the truth, and that is my difficulty to-day. If my client was responsible for Maud Bilton's trouble why bring in that painful scandal of the de Havilands? Why go any further? The reason for the assault would be so patent to everyone, in view of the evidence on that point, that my client would stand convicted without another shred of evidence. Why, then, bring in his relations with Yvonne du Barry, which pale to insignificance beside his alleged relations with Maud Bilton?" Sir Edmund paused as though to provide sufficient time for his insinuation to be assimilated, but in reality to give himself time to choose more carefully his subsequent phrases, for he knew the danger of his line of defence in the absence of two letters which Cleeve Barrington had mislaid and could not find.

"I will tell you why they are brought in," counsel continued. "Tennant's one desire is to blacken my client's character at all costs. Truth is being distorted to this end, and if, in the process of blackening, the reputations of those who are near and dear to him are attacked, so much the better. That is why Yvonne du Barry's

name has been brought so prominently into this case, and that is why the past history of Mrs. de Haviland has been raked up. But much as I deplore the raking up of past history and the motive behind it, from the point of view of justice to my client nothing could serve our purpose better. The scoundrel always over-reaches himself, and Michael Tennant is no exception to the rule. I shall call Mrs. de Haviland as a witness and she will tell you that Tennant never was a friend of her husband, George Henry de Haviland. And if you believe Mrs. de Haviland you can come to only one conclusion, that Tennant has committed wilful perjury. If you come to that conclusion, then I submit you can place no reliance on Tennant's evidence, except where it is corroborated by other reliable testimony. What other reliable evidence have we? Maud Bilton's letter? It means nothing! It is the letter of a distraught girl, a girl who clearly could not foresee, at the time she wrote it, the distorted meaning which the prosecution have sought to read into it. Read' in its proper light, that letter is the letter of a girl, a girl on the brink of eternity mind you, to her lover. It is not the letter of a godchild to her godfather. She asks Tennant to forgive Mr. Barrington, for what? For seducing her? Did you ever hear of a girl making such an appeal to her godfather? If Maud Bilton would not tell her mother the name of the man who had injured her, are you going to believe she would tell her godfather? The idea is too improbable for any sane person to contemplate! Cleeve Barrington will give you the correct story, and it is, thank God! a healthier and cleaner story. He accidentally overheard Maud Bilton and Tennant quarrelling in the wood which lies midway between the surgery of Dr. Mornington and his own home. He will tell you that he heard Tennant strike the girl, and, from what subsequently transpired, he formed the opinion that Maud Bilton was in trouble, and he guessed the nature of her trouble and the cause of it. It was a pure guess on his part and not the result of improper questions. Tennant, on Mr. Barrington's approach, like the coward he is, ran away, but not before my client had recognised him. Mr. Barrington will tell you, quite openly and frankly, that he took the first oppor-

tunity that presented itself to give Tennant the thrashing he deserved, and, he will also tell you that he would do the same thing to anyone who took advantage of any young girl, particularly a girl who was the daughter of one of his father's most trusted retainers. As to Bilton's evidence, you can put it also on one side. It is honest evidence. There is no doubt about that, but it is the evidence of a distracted father, the outcome of a letter which on the face of it would deceive a greater intelligence than Bilton possesses. He has read into that letter what Tennant intended he should and the consequent resentment has blinded his mental vision."

"I don't want to interrupt, Sir Edmund," interpolated Col. Cartwright, "but you have accepted Bilton's version of the conversation with his wife. You are not suggesting, are you, that there is any inaccuracy in his statement that Maud Bilton completely exonerated Mr. Tennant?"

"Such a suggestion is very far from my mind. But I think I can easily dispose of that part of Bilton's evidence. If Maud Bilton could lay down her life rather than yield up her secret, she would protect that secret at all costs. It is easier to lie for any cause than to die for it."

No part of counsel's speech gripped the court as this reply of his to Col. Cartwright, and Sir Edmund, realising the favourable impression his words had created, hastened to close his address.

"My learned friend has been at great pains to impress upon your worships that had Tennant been so disposed my client could have been put on trial for a much more serious offence, and would have you believe that Tennant refrained from doing so out of sheer generosity. That, from a man who has not scrupled to rake up the dead past out of sheer vindictiveness, is a preposterous suggestion, and no one but a fool or a knave would make it. Michael Tennant is no fool! And the reason he has not taken this case to a higher court is easily explained, for he would have to prove that the blow which caused that injury to his eye was struck by Mr. Barrington. That he has not attempted to do. That he could not do, for . . ." Here counsel paused for a moment. "Mr. Barrington will tell you in his evidence that he met Michael Tennant the morning after

the assault and there was not an injury or scratch of any kind on his face. If you accept this statement and couple it with Dr. Mornington's somewhat unsatisfactory evidence as to the exact date Tennant came to his surgery, and ask yourselves why, with such a serious injury, Tennant adopted the course of visiting the surgery instead of being treated at his own house, you will see that no jury could expunge from their minds a grave element of doubt. A doubt which will be all the more obvious when I emphasise the fact that not one single witness has been called, other than Tennant himself, to prove that the blow which caused Tennant's injury was struck at the meeting. It is because Tennant cannot prove this that he has not taken the case to a higher court. He has no wish to face a jury of his own countrymen on such an issue.

"Counsel for the prosecution has solicited your sympathy for his client on account of the serious injury he has sustained. I say he is not entitled to your sympathy. I go further than this and say that a man who claims the sympathy of any court for alleged acts which he cannot prove is a man whose evidence must 'a fortiori' be open to the gravest suspicion. That being so I ask you to conclude that the blow which permanently disfigured Tennant was not struck by my client at that meeting, but at a later period, by some other person than Mr. Barrington, and for some other reason than that which the prosecution would have you believe. Struck by some person known only to Tennant himself.

"My learned friend has appealed for the sympathy of this court, we appeal for its justice. That Cleeve Barrington did not assault Tennant is no part of our case. We admit the assault, but deny the blow. And I submit that the provocation received was of such a cumulative nature that any honourable man circumstanced as Mr. Barrington was circumstanced at the meeting, would have been goaded into committing acts which were beyond the power of human endurance to restrain. Our case is that Tennant is the seducer, and because my client gave him the thrashing he deserved he sought to injure him in two ways: by coming between him and Yvonne du Barry, and by breaking up his meeting. Tennant has admitted that he

used the knowledge which he had gained in Moscow to force Cleeve Barrington to break his engagement, but he has not told you that he used that knowledge in an endeavour to obtain Mr. du Barry's consent to an engagement between Yvonne du Barry and himself."

Sir John Simpson stood up. "If this is the line my learned friend proposes to take, I think the court is entitled to know the reasons why my client was not cross-examined on this point."

"I should have thought," Sir Edmund retorted, "that my learned friend already gathered my reasons. Throughout the whole of my pleadings I have made no secret of our contention that Tennant has deliberately distorted the truth, and I submit no useful purpose would have been served by providing Tennant with further opportunities for distortion."

"Then I presume that my learned friend will call Mr. du Barry in support of this contention?"

"My learned friend need presume no such thing. He knows as well as I do that Mr. du Barry is abroad, and that his exact whereabouts are unknown."

An amused smile of satisfaction spread over Sir John Simpson's face as he sat down.

"But," Sir Edmund continued, "Mrs. de Haviland will give evidence on the point. She will tell you that Michael Tennant waylaid her one night in the grounds of Swanston House, and offered to suppress all reference to her bigamous marriage if she would use her influence to induce her cousin to consent to a marriage between Yvonne du Barry and himself.

"With regard to Tennant's attempt to break up the meeting, Mr. Barrington will tell you that a note was thrust into his hand by his secretary, Miss Ellis, and that that note was such that it left no doubt in Mr. Barrington's mind that an organised attempt to break up the meeting was to be made, and that Michael Tennant was the ringleader."

Again Sir John Simpson rose to his feet. "I presume that that note will be produced in court, and that Miss Ellis will be called as a witness?"

"I wish my learned friend would not interrupt my pleading! If he will only exercise a little patience I shall make

our intentions perfectly clear. . . . Unfortunately for my client that note is also missing, and Miss Ellis is abroad, as far as we can make out, with the du Barrys, and in these circumstances the court will appreciate our difficulties."

"Another missing link?"

A gleam of amused satisfaction again shone in Sir John Simpson's eyes as he hurled out this taunt.

Sir Edmund gazed at his rival reflectively. Sir John's constant interruptions were rapidly destroying any favourable impressions which his opening statements had created. To refer to the subject matter of the second letter would, at this stage, only provide Sir John with another opportunity to introduce more damaging interpolations, for that second letter also could not be produced.

In the pause which naturally followed these reflections Sir Edmund decided to bring his speech to a close. The whole of his case, he now felt convinced, depended on Mrs. de Haviland's evidence. If that was believed he had more than a sporting chance. If it wasn't there was an end of the case as far as establishing Cleeve's bona fides were concerned. Like the capable advocate he was, Sir Edmund came to a rapid decision. He would make a few brief remarks about Mrs. de Haviland's evidence, close his speech and immediately put her in the box. And so it was with this intention he continued:

"There are no missing links of any vital importance in our case. It stands or falls by Mrs. de Haviland's evidence. If you believe her you can come to only one conclusion, namely that Tennant is a vindictive and perjured scoundrel, a man who will stop at nothing to gain his own ends. If you come to that conclusion, then I submit I am entitled to ask this court to accept Mr. Barrington's evidence wherever it is in conflict with the uncorroborated evidence of Michael Tennant." And then ignoring a further interruption from Sir John,—asking if there would be any corroboration of Mrs. de Haviland's evidence,—counsel for the defence resumed his seat.

"Eloise de Haviland." The name, uttered by the court crier, reverberated ominously through the court, for everyone had expected Sir Edmund to put his client at once into the witness-box.

“I don’t understand this, Sir Edmund,” said Col. Cartwright in a tone of disapproval. “You’re adopting a very unusual course. Are you not going to call your client?”

“I shall certainly put Mr. Barrington in the box, but this is a very unusual case, and I propose to take Mrs. de Haviland’s evidence first.”

Followed a few whispers on the bench and Col. Cartwright was speaking again:

“We have decided to adjourn till to-morrow, Sir Edmund,” he said, and it was remarked that the intonation of disapproval in Col. Cartwright’s voice still remained.

CHAPTER XLII

“**W**HAT made you do it?” asked the Hon. Alfred E. P. Maynard, to whom the announcement of the adjournment had come so suddenly and unexpectedly that he was quite at a loss to find adequate reason for what was really only Col. Cartwright’s decision.

“It was the only thing to do, Maynard,” replied Col. Cartwright to his fellow magistrate. “We’ve got to call an emergency meeting of the committee and nominate Martin Selby at once. Ought to have done it from the first, now it’ll be touch and go to get his papers through in time. I sent the call notices out during the lunch adjournment. Meeting’s at my house at five. Can I give you a lift?”

Maynard hesitated. He felt he would rather not attend the meeting of the committee of the Conservative Association, for it was against his tenets to hit any man when he was down, moreover Cleeve Barrington had, in his opinion, more than a sporting chance.

“Come, jump in, Maynard. We’ll be late as it is.”

There was something in Col. Cartwright’s voice which compelled Maynard to “jump in,” but it was not its commanding expression nor the flushed cheek and scowling eyes of the speaker—for these things would only have made Maynard’s hesitation greater—it was the ring of finality which decided him. Col. Cartwright generally got his own way, that is, when he made up his mind. It was obvious he had made it up about Cleeve Barrington. “But Cartwright won’t get his way this time,” said Maynard to himself, “that is, not unless he can convince me. I’ll split the committee rather than abandon Barrington on anything short of thorough conviction,” and with this reflection Maynard entered the purring car, humming its impatience for a released clutch, and had barely time to shut the door before it glided away.

"I think, Cartwright, you're rushing matters a bit, you know," said Maynard presently in a voice which was particularly persuasive. "If we once nominate Martin Selby there's no going back. He's a barrister, and these barrister chaps are so tenacious."

Col. Cartwright noted that persuasive ring. Maynard was always most dangerous and obstinate when he spoke like that, so he promptly "shortened his sail" to that dangerous wind.

"Look here, Maynard," he responded disarmingly, what time the flush faded from his cheeks and the grim expression left his mouth, for Col. Cartwright knew the value of the actor's art, "if Barrington had a dog's chance I'd risk it, but he hasn't."

"I don't agree with you. I've more than an open mind. If you had waited till Mrs. de Haviland had given her evidence I think we could have prejudged the issue, but as it is we can't. You let her name be called, and then on a consultation with us, which was little more than a pretence, you announced a decision to adjourn which had never been agreed to."

"Look here——"

"No, the thing's done; I'm not going back on that, I should have objected at the time, I know, but that's not what I'm driving at. I say the whole thing rests on Mrs. de Haviland's evidence. If she says her husband didn't know Tennant and that he tried to bully her into agreeing to a marriage with Yvonne, well, as far as I'm concerned, I'll give Barrington the benefit of the doubt."

"So would I, in ordinary circumstances. I think I'm even more sorry for Mrs. de Haviland than for Barrington, it's an awful position for her. I felt I'd like to knock out Tennant's other eye for attacking her, but sentiment isn't justice, is it?"

"Justice isn't everything." There was a soupçon of a sneer in Maynard's voice. "It puts too big a premium on cold, hard facts, and discounts circumstances and feelings like a Jew. If ever there was a white woman that woman is Eloise de Haviland, bigamy or no bigamy!" Maynard added heatedly.

Col. Cartwright noted that heat with inward satisfaction.

"So you'd believe every word she said?"

"Yes, I would!"

"So would I."

"Then why didn't you wait and hear what she had to say? Really, Cartwright, I don't understand you. You let that poor woman screw herself up to her ordeal in the box, let her go through all that anguish of mind and then, when her name is called, act like this! And she's got to go through it all again; do you know what that means? A night of agony, and all over again!"

"D'you think I don't feel that as much as you do? But if my own wife were in Mrs. de Haviland's position I should have been forced to do the same. Do you read Kipling?—

'Whatsoever for any cause
Seeketh to take or give
Power above or beyond the laws
Suffer it not to live!
Holy state or holy King
Or holy people's will—
Have no truck with the senseless thing
Order the guns and kill!'

"If we're not careful it'll come to that. It's either Conservative government or civil war, the Liberals aren't in the running, and Labour's wagged by its tail. I'd rather have Prussianism than Russianism and so would Labour if every working man was over the age of thirty. It's a case of killing now, to save killing later on, but killing feelings this time, as far as we are concerned. Whatever Mrs. de Haviland says, Barrington's guilty. Even if he gained the verdict the division would consider it a case of 'not proven,' the stigma would remain, the belief that we were influenced by a sense of class protection would live, and what chance would he have at the polls? No, Maynard, duty comes before justice or sentiment, and our duty is to our country in times like this."

"But if you believe Mrs. de Haviland, why throw over Barrington before you've heard her?"

"Because it's Mrs. de Haviland that's the unknown quantity. If Mrs. de Haviland says Tennant never knew

her husband it'll be the truth, but only the truth as far as her knowledge and belief extends. It doesn't follow that a woman, either before or after marriage, knows all her husband's friends; if she did there surely would be fewer marriages. If Tennant was not de Haviland's friend how did he obtain the knowledge of that bigamous marriage? And I've no doubt of the bigamy, have you?"

"Well, that's not all, is it, Cartwright? What about Tennant promising to keep the scandal quiet if Mrs. de Haviland would help him to marry Yvonne? And what about Cleeve's evidence? If he says he met Tennant the morning after the meeting and his eye was all right then, I'll believe him. I was on the platform and I never saw him strike Tennant."

"Maynard, you know that old saying: 'All's fair in love and war,' well I don't exactly agree, but a fellow when he's in love does some funny things sometimes."

"Oh yes, I know all that, but it was a dirty low down trick to try and get hold of Yvonne that way."

"My dear Maynard, if there hadn't been low down tricks on both sides this case would never have taken the turn it has. I don't think Cleeve's evidence is going to be quite a clean potato."

"Whatever makes you think that?"

"Well, I suppose I ought not to judge things from personal knowledge, but I can't help being influenced by what I saw and know. You say you did not see Cleeve strike Tennant, well if he didn't my eyesight must be at fault. I distinctly saw Cleeve let fly at Tennant, just as he got him to the door, and the next instant down Tennant went."

"I didn't see that, I thought Tennant stumbled."

"Well, he didn't; the floor's as flat as a pancake, there was nothing to stumble over; and, as for Cleeve saying he met Tennant the next morning, if he is going to say it, and Tennant's eye was all right; well, it doesn't fit in with what I remember. I met Cleeve just after he'd met Tennant, and as far as I can recollect it was not the morning after the meeting, but the morning after that, and there's no doubt that Tennant's eye was bashed in then."

"Are you sure?"

"Well, I wouldn't swear to it, but 'I'm pretty sure,' as

old Mornington says, and I'll tell you why. I remember distinctly talking to Cleeve about the summons. That was granted on the 21st, the Town Hall meeting was on the 19th. Well, if Cleeve met Tennant on the 20th as he's going to say, how could I have talked to him about the case that day, when I didn't know there was going to be a case? That's number one in my gizzard, as I've often heard Cleeve say. Number two, if Cleeve didn't bung up Tennant's eye, who did?"

"So you think," said Maynard dubiously, "that Cleeve's not going to stick to the truth?"

"What else can I think if he's going to say he met Tennant on the 20th and his eye was all right, when I know he met him on the 21st, if he met him at all?"

"But I'm sure Jervis is convinced that Cleeve's going to tell the truth, and I've never found Cleeve out in a lie, nor has anyone else."

"But you've never seen Cleeve in a corner like this before, nor has anyone else. It's these impetuous, reckless natures which get carried away by the heat or passion of the moment; and I fancy that's just what happened with Cleeve and Maud Bilton. Case of sudden temptation, he couldn't resist, but he's in a damned mess now, Maynard, and he's got to get out of it as best he can. Not for his own sake, I know Cleeve well enough to say he wouldn't tell a lie to save his own skin. It's that mother of his he's lying for. As for Jervis, I am not carried away by his rhetoric. . . . It's his job to speak convincingly, and you've got to hear Simpson's reply. If I'm any judge of expressions, he's quite confident of the issue, and as for me, when a man like Jervis begins to talk about 'reasonable doubt' I know he hasn't much faith in the cause he advocates; but apart from everything else, that letter of Maud Bilton's is quite enough. Jervis can say what he likes, these legal minds lay too much stress on rational acts. It's all very well to thump the table and ask us what we or any other rational man would do in such circumstances, but we men don't have babies and no rational man or woman commits suicide. Those who do it are not rational and their acts must be judged from irrational standards. A girl on the brink of eternity, as

Jervis put it, doesn't write and ask her godfather to forgive a few blows given in the heat of the moment. The suggestion is absurd! Maud Bilton asked forgiveness for her lover, her last acts were her sacrifice to her love. Woman-like, she gave her secret to the keeping of a man. Not to her mother; she knew the failing of her sex. Not to her father; his injury was hers magnified. The whole defence is weak; rob it of Jervis' eloquence and what does it all amount to? Mrs. de Haviland will tell you Tennant was never a friend of her husband—an obvious absurdity, Maynard—considering what he knows—therefore Tennant is a liar. Maud Bilton's letter only refers to a few blows, therefore it must be Tennant who put her in the family way! You can't swallow that, Maynard, can you?"

"Well, old boy, put that way it doesn't look very hopeful for Barrington, I must admit."

"But that's the position we've got to face, isn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose it is." Maynard spoke the words reluctantly, like one convinced against his will.

"So, you see, what else can we do? We must nominate Martin Selby, we can't throw the seat away."

"No, I suppose there's nothing else to be done."

CHAPTER XLIII

“‘E LOISE DE HAVILAND!’”

The name was called for the second time, and then the tall, stately figure entered the box. The public strained forward to catch the first glimpse of the woman they all knew, at any rate by sight, brought face to face with her shame, to see the destruction of her hauteur, to view the ravages of a night of torment. Her friends looked with pity and sympathy in their hearts; but the nervous, sinking feeling which comes to all of us when a friend, whose friendship we have been proud to claim, for the first time faces her accusers in such a setting, gave place to astonishment. Mrs. de Haviland bore no signs of having passed a sleepless night, the expression on her face was one of serene relief.

Sir John Simpson noticed it with satisfaction; old hand at the game he recognised it as the outward and visible sign of the courage which guilt found out inspires. One glance told him the nature and quality of her evidence. She would, out of revenge, give Tennant the lie wherever possible, for the rest it would be the truth and nothing but the truth.

“‘Woman at bay is a courageous animal,’” he whispered to his junior, who, looking steadfastly at her for a few moments over the rims of his tortoiseshell spectacles, silently nodded his answer.

Sir Edmund Jervis was aware of what was passing through the minds of his opponents. In the absence of those missing letters his defence could only be successful in a favourable atmosphere. The manner in which Col. Cartwright had peremptorily adjourned the proceedings in spite of his, Sir Edmund’s, impassioned appeal to have Mrs. de Haviland’s evidence heard, had convinced him that the atmosphere was not favourable. If only Barrington

had written that apology—— Then as that thought occurred to him he remembered Barrington's words: "Will no one believe in me?" and his mouth firmed.

Mrs. de Haviland was taking the oath. She swore that the evidence she would give in this case would be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

"If she did that," Sir Edmund told himself as he rose to examine, "uninfluenced by any feelings of revenge, he might have a chance. It was worth fighting for because he believed in Barrington."

"Your name is?"

"Eloise du Barry."

Eloise du Barry! Was the woman mad? Was she going to say she had never been legally married to de Haviland? For once Sir John Simpson dropped his mask, he dropped the pencil he was holding, rather, he threw it on the table in a manner indicative of disgust, and leant back in his chair. "Phew!" He made no attempt to render inaudible the sound, half-whistle, which escaped his lips. He had not accepted Tennant's statement of that bigamous marriage without the fullest investigations. The woman was going to lie, lie as only a woman can; but it didn't alter the fact that he had a totally different case to meet. He had been so sure that the bigamous marriage would not be denied that he had not thought it necessary to obtain the documents which would prove the legality of her marriage with de Haviland, or examined Tennant particularly on that point. Now it was too late, his case was closed. Later on he could have her prosecuted for perjury, and he would, but that would take time. Meanwhile Barrington would win his case and the election.—Sir John was not aware that the Conservative Association had already thrown over Barrington and adopted Martin Selby.—Barrington, the arch fiend, would go scot free. He could not have Barrington re-tried because one of his witnesses had not told the truth. His friend, the Labour candidate, would not have the walk-over he, Sir John, had anticipated as a result of this trial, and it was his friend more than Tennant for whom he was fighting.

Sir Edmund was even more taken aback than Sir John. It was only after seeing Mrs. de Haviland yesterday that

Barrington had confirmed that bigamous marriage, but the attitude of Sir John had stiffened Sir Edmund's self-control. For himself he would show no surprise; if Mrs. de Haviland liked to commit perjury for Barrington's sake that was her look out. His duty was to his client. He had no doubt of Barrington's innocence, "none whatever," he said to himself, "and if Mrs. de Haviland saves him at the expense of her own freedom, well, she will not be the first among women to sacrifice everything for love of child or man, God bless them! For our duty's sake we barristers have sometimes to pour scorn on such women, but in our hearts we love them. I know it," he almost murmured, "we all know it. God knows it. It was Adam who whined, not Eve, yet hers was the greater punishment."

And so it came about that Sir Edmund gave an encouraging nod of his head as he continued his examination, and even Col. Cartwright was aware of the added deference in his manner.

"Is there any truth in the statement that you are not legally married to Mr. du Barry?"

"Not that I'm aware of."

Sir John was on his feet. "Really, your worships, this is going too far! My learned friend's examination absolutely appals me. Has he forgotten that it is part of his case that this witness would swear that Tennant was not a friend of her husband, Mr. de Haviland, and that we have given conclusive evidence that Mr. de Haviland is alive?"

It was Sir Edmund's turn now to be perturbed; he had been so taken aback by Mrs. de Haviland's intended sacrifice that he had shot out that question without thought and had momentarily forgotten that pleading of his. How had he come to make such a mistake? His deferential manner disappeared and in cold calm tones he warned his witness to be careful—"He wanted the truth!" Then hurriedly turning over his notes he held a whispered conversation with Barrington, looked more puzzled still, Barrington nodded but looked dumbfounded and only one soul in that room looked self-possessed—Mrs. de Haviland.

The general public, every member of the bench, wore the same expression, the expression on the faces of an

audience listening to a farce. Sir Edmund glanced at Sir John and the look of the latter steeled him.

"I will put my question in another way," he continued sternly. "Have you ever contracted a bigamous marriage?"

"Not to my knowledge, at the time."

"What is the name of your present husband?"

"Gerald du Barry."

"Are you known by that name?"

"I am known by the name of de Haviland."

"How came you by that name?"

"It is the name of my former husband and until now I have never changed it."

"Can you tell us why?"

"I only heard of his death late last night."

Sir Edmund felt he understood this poor woman at last. She had borne the name of the husband who had deserted her for all those years, and now, for the first time, she felt she could assume the name of the man who had contracted an illegal marriage with her without fear of Mr. de Haviland's molestations. She was assuming that her marriage with du Barry was now legal. Such an assumption betrayed an appalling ignorance of the law, but it was the only possible explanation. A woman like Mrs. de Haviland would not deliberately tell such obvious lies, and she hadn't lied to Barrington yesterday when she had confirmed her illegal marriage; but it was not for him, Sir Edmund, to drag out her secrets. His "learned friend" would no doubt cross-examine her on the illegality and, when the law was explained to her in the process of cross-examination, she would admit it openly, frankly. He felt convinced she was a truthful witness, a scrupulously truthful witness. She would lay bare the mistake of her life, seeking neither to palliate nor excuse it, would lay it bare with the candour and openness which always carries conviction in any court. His best course was to put his two relevant questions, close his examination, and let Sir John do his worst.

"Was Michael Tennant a friend of Mr. de Haviland?"

"Never!"

"Did Tennant seek your influence to bring about a marriage between himself and Yvonne du Barry, under

threat of exposing your relations with your cousin, Gerald du Barry?"

"Yes."

Sir John rose to cross-examine, not quite so sure of himself. The atmosphere which a truthful witness creates was not lost on him. The self-confidence of Mrs. de Haviland shook his self-confidence. Was there a trap somewhere? He rapidly reviewed the chain of evidence against Barrington, and his confidence returned; the chain was too complete, too strong to be broken. Sir Edmund, too, he concluded, knew its strength, that was why his examination of the witness had been so curtailed.

"I want to question you about your marriage . . . legal or otherwise, I shall come to that later . . . with Mr. du Barry. I suppose you will not deny such a marriage took place?" Sir John snapped out sarcastically.

"There were two marriages," responded Mrs. de Haviland.

"Two marriages. Will you kindly explain?"

"Mr. de Haviland left me about twelve months after our marriage and went to Mexico with a friend of his, a Mr. Clark, and about a month afterwards he wrote me from Mexico City that he was considering the question of separating from me and would make a proposal in his next letter. Shortly after that there was a fire in one of the big hotels there, and it was burnt to the ground. Mr. de Haviland and Mr. Clark were in the hotel at the time, and, according to newspaper reports, Mr. de Haviland lost his life and Mr. Clark was rescued just before the building finally collapsed. I did not hear from Mr. de Haviland again, and naturally presumed the newspaper reports were correct. After a while I went to Switzerland; there I met my cousin Mr. du Barry, who had followed me, and whom, I am proud to say, I have always loved. It was jealousy over Mr. du Barry which came between Mr. de Haviland and myself, for neither before nor after marriage did I disguise my love. I showed Mr. du Barry the newspaper reports, and then, as he had recently come into the family estates on the death of his father, he tried to persuade me to marry him. For a week or two I resisted his pleading; I was very young at the time, I feared Mr. de

Haviland greatly, and furthermore, I did not wish to offend his people by marrying so soon after his death, or my own people, seeing that Mr. du Barry's father had hardly been two months in his grave. In the end, however, I agreed, but only on condition that we lived, for a time, in obscurity in Switzerland, and under an assumed name. I really made this condition because I was so frightened of Mr. de Haviland that I could not banish from my mind the possibility of his reappearing one day and creating trouble.

"It was our intention to live quietly like this for a few months, then come to England and inform our friends we had been married abroad, but to keep the date an absolute secret. Later on we were told by a very trusted friend that our marriage under an assumed name was not legal. We had taken a little *châlet* near a remote and out of the way village, and were known as Mr. and Mrs. Wingate, the name Mr. du Barry had assumed. When we learnt that there was a doubt about the legality of our marriage we were naturally very perturbed; we could not go through another ceremony in Switzerland without creating a scandal, so we decided to go to Moscow and get married at the British Embassy. Mr. du Barry made all arrangements for this with a great friend of his, Captain Barrington, now Colonel Barrington, Mr. Cleeve Barrington's father, who was the Military Attaché there at the time; he was let into the secret and, for both our sakes, promised to prevent any publicity.

"It was to discuss the arrangements that we went to St. Moritz where Captain Barrington was staying. Unfortunately, on the day before we were all due to leave, Mr. de Haviland reappeared, and there was an angry scene in the hotel. In the altercation and recriminations which followed it transpired that it was Mr. Clark who had been burnt in the hotel and that Mr. de Haviland had not only deliberately allowed the authorities to assume his death, but had identified the charred remains of Mr. Clark as those of his own. Mr. du Barry then openly accused him of plotting my destruction, and it was then, for the first time, that Mr. de Haviland showed himself in his true colours. He gloried in his deceit, made no secret of the fact that

he had made every effort to have his own death widely published in the hope that I would remarry and give him the opportunity of taking a terrible revenge.

“Travelling under the name of Mr. Clark, it transpired that Mr. de Haviland returned to Europe, traced me to Switzerland, made himself thoroughly acquainted with our circumstances, and then, following us to St. Moritz, deliberately created a terrible scene. We were sitting at dinner in the public dining-room at the time and words were quickly changed to blows. Mr. Tennant, who was the hotel manager, sent for the police, and when Mr. de Haviland found that the police regarded him as the aggressor, and were prepared, at Mr. Tennant’s instigation, to prosecute him—for naturally Mr. Tennant resented such a scene in one of his public rooms—Mr. de Haviland became more reasonable and we all retired to a private room to try and arrange matters. I wanted to give the widest publicity to what had happened, but Mr. du Barry wouldn’t hear of it. His one idea was to save me from such a scandal, and for the sake of our child, then unborn, he finally persuaded me to accept the terms on which Mr. de Haviland was prepared to hush things up. A fairly easy matter, as we happened to be the only English people in the hotel at the time, and were staying under the name of Wingate. Both Mr. du Barry and I have strictly adhered to the terms except in one particular. Just before my baby was born we met in Moscow by arrangement, and went through another ceremony at the Embassy, as previously intended. We met at the Embassy and separated there. That second marriage was a legal one, and——”.

“I think I shall be able to disabuse your mind about that,” said Sir John sarcastically. “According to your own statement, you only heard of your husband’s death last night, and Mr. Tennant has stated in his evidence that he met your husband in Moscow a few months ago. You don’t wish the court to believe you are so unsophisticated that you don’t know any marriage, under assumed names or otherwise, is illegal during the lifetime of your husband?”

“You don’t let me finish what I have to say. I was going to——”

“I have let you go quite far enough. I did not stop

you before because a lady in your position does not, as a rule, contract an illegal marriage from sordid motives, and I did not wish to deprive you of an opportunity to explain to the public, through this court, the circumstances which brought about your union with Mr. du Barry. But we are not trying you, Mrs. de Haviland, we are trying Barrington, and I must ask you to confine your remarks to the points raised by me in cross-examination, and none other. What made you go through that second illegal marriage?"

"That is very difficult to explain, but I was ill at the time, very ill, and perhaps we're not quite normal at such times, moreover, just as I had a feeling when I first married Mr. du Barry that my former husband was alive, I then had a feeling he was dead. Anyway, I wanted to marry under the name of du Barry, and I'm glad I did, for that marriage in Moscow was legal, although I did not know it at the time."

"Legal? How d'you make that out?" Sir John questioned sharply, aware from her very persistence that the point could not be burked.

"Well, read that if you won't let me explain," Mrs. de Haviland replied heatedly, holding out a letter towards Sir John as she spoke.

Sir John, who, with bowed head and bent back, had been momentarily examining his notes, was so startled by Mrs. de Haviland's heated and indignant reply that he raised his head suddenly, his spectacles dropped from his nose, and falling on the table in front of him, their glasses broke; but he took the letter, held it a long way from him in an effort to decipher its contents, shook his head despairingly, and addressed the court.

"I am afraid that without my spectacles I am unable to read this, but with your permission I will ask my junior . . ."

"If you will hand me the letter," said Colonel Cartwright agitatedly, "I will read it."

A puzzled frown puckered Colonel Cartwright's brows as he gave a cursory glance to ascertain its purport.

“Ahem!” he coughed. “I’m afraid I don’t quite understand this.” Then, coughing again to clear his throat, he read:

Hotel Geneva, Berne.

MY DEAR MOTHER,

We are fighting against time, but father is hopeful that the Federal Court will give its decision to-morrow night. He is going to write you by the same post, giving you full details of how the case has progressed up till now, so I need not go into that; I have a more important thing to write about. When I left Longfield I took Miss Ellis with me, as I did not want Cleeve’s correspondence to be held up. I knew he would be very upset at my sudden departure and the temporary breaking off of the engagement, so we, that is, Miss Ellis and I, bundled all the letters and papers on his desk into an empty portmanteau, and Miss Ellis answered as many as she could before leaving Paris. But naturally the work was interrupted because we had to leave so hurriedly to attend the inquest here, and it was not until to-day that Miss Ellis was able to deal with the few remaining letters, and what do you think we found?—a letter from Maud Bilton to Cleeve. I don’t know how it could have got mixed up with his official correspondence, but I am sending it on at once, as, although I don’t know what the real case is against Cleeve, I had a feeling on reading Maud Bilton’s letter that it might come in useful. That beast, Mr. Tennant, hinted to me once that Cleeve was responsible for Maud Bilton’s death, and I was silly enough at the time to listen to him. This letter has opened my eyes. Even now I can hardly believe that any man could descend so low as to blame someone else for his own evil work; it is too horrible to contemplate. Oh, how I hate myself now for ever listening to him; I feel, although I should always have loved Cleeve, no matter what he had done, as though I shall never be able to look him in the face again. I hate myself so much I really can’t write any more, mother; I feel I am almost as contemptible as that beast himself.

Always, darling, your affectionate daughter,

YVONNE.

After reading the letter aloud Colonel Cartwright looked first at Sir Edmund, then at Sir John, who were both gazing at him with bewilderment on their faces.

“I can’t understand it,” Colonel Cartwright repeated dazedly, as though to himself.

“I have given you the wrong letter,” Mrs. de Haviland explained composedly, and as she uttered the words the

eyes of everyone in court fastened on her face. She drew another letter from her bag and, with a sweetly triumphant smile, passed it up to the bench. It was an official-looking document, tied with green tape and attached to it was a large red judicial-looking seal, and a letter signed by Mr. du Barry. Colonel Cartwright turned the letter over and his eyes fell on "Your lawful husband at long, long last, Gerald."

"This is a personal letter to you, Mrs. de Haviland, do you want me to read it to the court?"

"Most certainly."

During this conversation Maynard was seen whispering to Colonel Cartwright, who abstractedly handed him Yvonne du Barry's letter.

MY DARLING WIFE,

How can I tell you the glad news? For there are tears in my eyes as I write, tears, my dear wife, of gladness for the future, but tears of sorrow and bitterness for the long, long years of unnecessary separation which cannot be recalled. The Federal Court have decided that the body discovered at the foot of the glacier, which I wrote you about, is that of George Henry de Haviland. When I saw it two days ago I recognised it at once. It was de Haviland as he was twenty years ago, dressed in that horribly loud fawn and brown check knickerbocker suit, which he was wearing when he entered the hotel. An alpine stock was clasped in his hand, and except that the features were cold and wax-like there was not a sign that all these years have passed since we last saw him alive. It appears that the next morning, according to the evidence of an old guide, now retired, he was seen in the neighbourhood of the glacier unattended, and although his luggage was at the Grand Hotel, St. Moritz, where he had engaged a room, which was quite clear from the entry in the Hotel books, he was never seen again and the court have presumed his death from that date. The decision was given late to-night, and at first the judge refused to give me a copy of the judgment at such a late hour. But I saw him in his chambers afterwards, and when he heard my story he was moved by human compassion. You will hardly believe it, but that kindly man is writing a copy of the judgment with his own hand as I write this letter to you. We have just half an hour to catch the post, so with this letter you will receive a copy of the official judgment, which will set at rest once and for all the legality of our marriage at Moscow. Oh, my dear wife—

"I would rather you did not read any more, if you don't mind, Colonel Cartwright, the rest is . . ."

Sir John rose hastily to support Mrs. de Haviland's request.

"I have no wish to hear any more. I am only concerned with the judgment of the Federal Court."

"It is in French, Sir John" said Colonel Cartwright, as he handed it to him.

"A matter of no consequence as far as I am concerned," responded Sir John, "without my glasses I cannot read, but I would like an opportunity of going through it with my learned junior."

At this break in the proceedings all eyes were turned to the seat which had been occupied by Michael Tennant; it was empty. A moment later Sir John was on his feet.

"We cannot dispute this," he said, tapping the document in his hand.

"Will you allow me one minute, Sir John," said Maynard. "There is an enclosure to Miss du Barry's letter. Mrs. de Haviland, have you got it?"

"It is here; do you want it?"

"If you please, Mrs. de Haviland," replied Maynard eagerly.

A whispered conversation took place between Maynard and Cartwright, then the latter leant over the desk and communicated something to the clerk of the court. A moment later the name of Bilton was called, and as he entered the witness box for the second time in that court, he turned dazed eyes on the bench.

"Bilton," said Maynard, "will you look at this letter and tell us if it is in the handwriting of your daughter?"

Bilton glanced at it nervously. "Yes," he faltered.

"Then I will read it to you," Maynard replied.

DEAR MR. BARRINGTON,

As you know what has happened between Mr. Tennant and me I am writing to ask you to forgive him. It is my dying wish that you never lay hands on him again, for I love him, Mr. Cleeve, oh, you don't know how much, and he is not to blame. I am quite resigned to my fate and my only thought is for those I leave behind. For Daddy's sake and Mother's do not breathe a word about this letter. I want them to bring in a verdict of "accidental death."

Please don't think less of me for writing like this, I only want to spare Mother and Daddy; I never want them to know what has happened. Mr. Cleeve, I want you to realise that I forgive you for striking Mr. Tennant, for I know you only did it because he would not marry me, but you know he is a gentleman, and it could not be. He is not only to blame. Oh, how it hurts now to say it, but the truth is I am more to blame than him.

Yours respectfully,
MAUD BILTON.

As Maynard finished reading Sir Edmund's triumphant voice sounded throughout the court room.

"I think the letters just read in this court have caused as much surprise to the prosecution as they have to me. There can now be only one verdict, and that verdict, your worships, I ask you to pronounce. Cleeve Barrington's defence has all along been that he acted as he did under the stress of great provocation. Had any man greater? The case against him has been built up by lie upon lie, and I am sure my learned friend will join with me in the hope that a scoundrel like Tennant will in due course receive the punishment he deserves, for a more perjured blackguard has never given evidence in any court. Words in a case like this are superfluous, and I have no doubt that in due course your worships will issue a warrant for his arrest? I presume you do not wish us to proceed any further with our case?"

"Most decidedly not, Sir Edmund," replied Col. Cartwright. "As far as the bench is concerned, we have come to the conclusion that this is a case where the provocation has been so great as to warrant our treating the assault as a technical offence. Mr. Barrington came into court with the dies weighted heavily against him, and a more happy ending, as far as the defence is concerned, I cannot conceive. Mr. Barrington leaves this court with more honour and respect, if that were possible, than when he entered it. He has acted as few of us would have done, and after reading Miss du Barry's letter and having had the privilege of hearing your evidence, Mrs. du Barry," added Col. Cartwright with a courteous bow, "I hope the future holds compensations for the very trying ordeal you have all had to face. . . . The case is dismissed."

EPILOGUE

“**I** KNOW what you’re thinking about, Gerald.”

Mr. du Barry, thus suddenly recalled from his reverie, looked at his wife as she sat regarding him through eyes which only a few seconds before had filled with tears. The clamour of the departed guests who had given Cleeve and Yvonne such a splendid send-off still rang in her ears as she awaited her husband’s reply.

“I don’t think you do, Eloise.”

“I know they will be happy.”

“I wasn’t thinking about that.”

“I know you weren’t, Gerald. I think my thoughts must have wandered again, and I didn’t know I was speaking them aloud. You were wondering whether he will get in, weren’t you now?”

“Well, partly that,” Mr. du Barry admitted slowly.

“I thought so. I think you’re as fond of Cleeve as I am.”

“You have always liked him, haven’t you, Eloise?”

“Yes, and I always intended he should marry Yvonne.”

“Do you think he will get in?”

“I think he has a very good chance. I wouldn’t like to say more than that. You see, Gerald dear, Martin Selby’s had such splendid meetings. He knows the psychology of the voters, plays on their weaknesses, and all Cleeve had to offer was his honesty. They all know he has their welfare at heart, but there’s no doubt eloquence tells, and Martin Selby can speak. If you had asked me yesterday I think I would have said no, but now I’m not so sure. It was a regular brain wave of Yvonne’s to insist on the wedding taking place on the nineteenth as originally intended. At the time I thought it very unwise for them to be married on the polling day, but women like a marriage, Gerald, and what with the organ playing, the bells

ringing, and the election on at the same time, I've never seen such a crowd in the square; and that short speech of Cleeve's with Yvonne on his arm I'm sure went to the women's hearts. He looked so happy and proud when he asked them just to take him on trust as his wife had done, and pleaded that, although no one had ever accused a Barrington of having the brains of an Oxford don, it did appear logical to him that if one woman could give her life into his keeping the women of Longfield, who had known him all their lives, might trust him with their votes. And I'm sure that Yvonne's few words when they asked her for a speech helped too . . . when she said she knew she was going to be happy with him, but she would be ever so much happier if they would make him happy too. That she'd married him simply because he was honest and good, and she thought we wanted those qualities just as much in Parliament as we want them in our homes. And I couldn't help smiling, Gerald, when she added with that mischievous twinkle in her eyes: 'I know he's kind. Too kind in fact, for once I saw him carry a sack of potatoes for a woman who, if you ask me anything, ought to have been made to carry them herself!' "

"Eloise, I wish I could share that hope with you; if only I'd listened to you I would have been a happier man to-day. If Cleeve doesn't get in it'll be all my fault."

"What d'you mean, Gerald?"

"I mean if I hadn't made such heavy weather of it all. I ought to have listened to you, dear, and defied de Haviland from the first; and when I think of my clumsy subterfuge to keep Yvonne out of marriage by calling her Mrs. du Barry and insisting on her wearing a wedding ring I feel so disgusted with myself that I want a third leg to kick myself with! I'm sure the people think even now that there is some mystery about Yvonne, and if Cleeve doesn't get in it'll be all my fault."

"Gerald, you mustn't talk like that; whatever you did you did it to protect my name. Men always make heavy weather of a scandal where their love is concerned; they can't help it, Gerald, they're built that way. That is why I let you do it. I didn't want to lose your love, and I might have lost it if I hadn't let you have your way. But,

Gerald, the past is past sighing for; I meant Cleeve and Yvonne to marry from the first, something has always told me that in their union we should find ours, and even if that glacier hadn't given up its secret I should have succeeded. They were meant for one another just as you and I were. And, Gerald, you love me just the same as you always did! Just as you did those twenty long, long years ago?" . . .

* * * * * *

"You know, Yvonne, I think you should have brought your maid with you. What does it matter if everyone in the hotel does know we're newly married? I want to let the whole world know!" said Cleeve exuberantly.

"So do I, Cleeve, only . . ." Yvonne stopped in confusion.

"Only what?"

"Only . . ." Her eyelids fluttered and drooped until they hid the violet eyes from view. "Only I don't want people in the hotel to know. Cécile would just bubble over with delight and tell everyone."

The city clocks were striking eleven as the taxi swung into the rubber paved courtyard of the Savoy Hotel.

"Now, remember," Yvonne added quickly, "We are Mr. and Mrs. Molyneux for to-night. . . . You like that name, don't you, John! . . . and you're to act as though we've been married for at least three years. You're to get out of the taxi first and don't take anything, leave the handbag and your overcoat for me. I shall call you John and you must call me Betty; now don't forget, will you?"

Cleeve had no time to forget; the taxi drew up in front of the entrance and two porters were helping them to alight.

"Your bag, madam?" said one, seeking to relieve her of the comparatively small case she was carrying; but, without taking advantage of his proffered assistance, Yvonne followed Cleeve, who, acting under tuition, was already entering the hotel, leaving her to follow as though he were as unconcerned with her whereabouts as . . . a well-married man often is.

The head porter touched his cap.

"Pay the taxi, please," said Yvonne.

The head porter signified assent and indicated the reception counter.

"You have a suite of rooms for me?" asked Cleeve in a simulated bored voice.

"Yes, sir. What name?"

"Molyneux."

"Suite 46," the clerk called to the head porter. "Will you both sign the book, please sir?"

"Betty, will you come and sign?"

"Yes, John," said Yvonne in a voice which seemed specially raised for the benefit of the crowd of people seated in the lounge, many of whom were gazing at her curiously. "I remember this place now," added Yvonne, as though suddenly struck by a recollection. "This is where we stayed three years ago, John, don't you remember? . . . And we had a room overlooking the courtyard, hadn't we?"

"Good Lord, yes! Of course we did, now I come to think of it," Cleeve responded as though the recollection had suddenly dawned on him too.

"There's a telegram for you, sir," said the clerk, looking at them with inquisitive eyes as he handed the wire to Cleeve.

Cleeve opened it, wondering as he did so whether there might be another John Molyneux in the hotel, but the name of his father at the foot of the telegram dispelled all doubt.

Election going overwhelmingly in your favour. Result cannot possibly be affected when ballot boxes of outlying villages are counted to-morrow. Return to Longfield by ten train to-morrow morning. Imperative you should be here by noon to thank your supporters publicly on your election as our member of Parliament.

SAM BARRINGTON.

Without a word Cleeve handed it to Yvonne, and as she read it her eyes widened in incredulous delight and then, letting the telegram flutter to the ground, dropping his overcoat and releasing her hold on the handbag, she flung her arms round Cleeve's neck, regardless of the interest displayed by the occupants of the lounge.

Yvonne's next words crashed like the opening bars of the wedding march in a hushed church. . . .

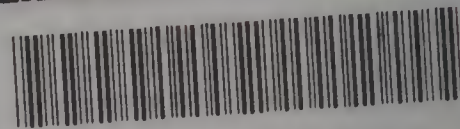
"Oh, Cleeve, this is the best wedding present we've had!"

"Cleeve's face broadened into a wide grin as he whispered maliciously: "And we stayed here three years ago, didn't we?"

THE END

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